OUTPOSTS OF THE FLEET

EDWARD NOBLE

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OUTPOSTS OF THE FLEET

STORIES OF THE MERCHANT SERVICE IN WAR AND PEACE

BY

EDWARD NOBLE

AUTHOR OF "THE BOTTLE-FILLERS"

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I have to thank the Editors of *The Yorkshire Post*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Daily Mail* and *Bristol Observer*, for their permission to reproduce here the sketches which first appeared in their columns. Also the Editor of Cassell's Magazine for a similar courtesy in the case of those stories which he originally published.

NOTE

In the year 1903, when writing one of a series of articles on the Merchant Service in *The Yorkshire Post*, I said, in referring to the question of recognition—

"How is this man recognized? He is not recognized at all. He is a sailor. The Church knows nothing of him except that annually it dispenses tracts, printed in block letters, to him and wonders at his stolid indifference. The State passes him by; he is without representation; practically cut off from voting; he cannot make himself heard. Thus the greatest race of sailor-men the world has ever seen is treated as a negligible quantity by the two great upholders of national dignity.

"Oh, but you say, the Board of Trade looks after these matters. True, it does—but how? A crew comes in after having gone through a fight with Nature. Perhaps it has rescued

a ship's company ; perhaps it has towed a disabled vessel into port. The Board of Trade steps along and says : 'You have been good boys, you have behaved nobly : here is a watch for you, a pair of binoculars ; something nice and useful.' Precisely. But these things men can buy. You pay with a paltry watch or spy-glass for heroism, for services that sometimes empty the chairs at home, while a grocer's ability to amass a fortune is considered worthy of Knighthood. How British !

"For risk of life one does not ask payment, one asks for recognition. Is there nothing due beyond a watch or binoculars ? Is there no Honour, no Order, for the sailor who has done his duty and a little more ? Is he lower in the scale of things than the soldier, the fireman, or policeman ? Or is it that he has not the means of making his presence felt ? If there be an Order one has never heard of it. It must be as difficult to obtain as a Commission in the Naval Reserve."

And still, in spite of added hazards, I see no Order.

E. N.

CONTENTS

PAGE

HOMEWARD WITH GRAIN—

I. THE SUNRISE SQUALL 1
II. UP THE SLOPE 13
III. UNDER FIRE 26

HOLDING THE BLUE RIBBON 50

TORPEDOED 60

THE *NELSON'S* ANCHOR 74

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CAPTAIN BIN . . 100

THE CHANNEL'S VOICES 139

THE TRAMP 151

THE MONSTER 160

A STRANGE LIGHT IN CHANNEL . . . 172

HOMEWARD WITH GRAIN

I

THE SUNRISE SQUALL

"A man who would go to sea for pleasure, should go to hell for pastime."—*Old Saying.*

Dawn on the confines of the South Pacific, and a sea marching with brazen crests to thrash the torn edges of the island with the inappropriate name—Tierra del Fuego.

Dawn. The sky aflame, slashed with coppery wisps, a dun bank of clouds grouped upon an horizon glowing like a brazier, and two ships under a heavy pressure of canvas drawing foam-tracks towards the dim cluster of rocks perched eerily at the end of the world which they must pass. Men call them the islands of Diego Ramirez, in memory of the adventurous navigator who discovered them; but they stand to the south of Tierra del Fuego, and are cold, bleak mountain peaks

from which the softer terrain has been washed by the greybeards of Cape Horn.

A sou'-west gale roared in the rigging of these two ships. Seas leaped upon them, sweeping their decks, hammering at them, even as they leaped upon the island with its granite outposts; but the ships moved onward, carrying grain for the British nation, as was their destiny.

On the bow and under the stern of each was a name printed in white lettering—*Manitou* on this, *Jugg rnaut* on that. Sometimes the legend appeared through the driving-spume, sometimes the spume smothered it, and it seemed that the ships had melted into the giant rollers which battered them.

Grey air, grey sea, grey sky, flecked and whipped with coppery ribbons of cloud, and out there the still pinnacles of Diego Ramirez, foam-clad, cold, to mock them. It was a point these two must pass before the driving could be eased.

They came together at dawn. Two hours ago neither had been conscious of the other's presence; now men stood on deck and commented on the capers each cut as they slammed

at the greybeards. They stared, too, at a cloud lifting out there in the sou'-west, snow and hail in its keeping.

The men on the *Juggernaut* were screened from the sea, and stood lashed awaiting its advent. It was the sunrise squall which heralds the approach of day, and in the wilderness screams with a note of anger. The *Manitou* required easing. Even a landsman could have seen that. She leaned over, under whole topsails and courses. She dug at the rollers and showered them upon her in tons. The water ran white from her decks—spouting like water from an opened sluice. She rose to a greybeard as a steeplechaser rises to a wall in his path, and her forefoot appeared curving back upon the keel. She flounced suddenly at the impact, struggling to regain her stride, and her rudder lifted from the seas. Her crew stood, like those who watched, on the break of the poop, grabbing the lifelines and staring at the bath on the main deck where presently they must work waist deep.

Some snowflakes drove horizontally through the rigging. The dun cloud had lifted, and was now an arch moving to the zenith. The

wind raised its voice—a low moan which the wire shrouds transformed into a shriek.

The *Juggernaut's* lord, a still figure clad in gleaming oilskins, moved slightly behind the weather-cloth. He lifted one hand and cried out—

"Tops'l halliards there! Stand by!"

The men heard and turned to obey. Eight able seamen and three boys passed chattering into the main-deck wash.

"Whirroo! It's cowld, it's cowld!" said one.

"Phut! Yer sister's cowld," said another. "See the bloomin' *Manitou!*"

The *Manitou* was busy scooping the seas, lurching, smothered in foam. She was rigid, without spring—the modern thing of steel and iron we still term a ship. She was built to carry a batty of cargo; all other considerations were expunged. And now the spray flew high over her, wetting her tops'ls as she swooped upon the seas.

"They'd best take some of them rags off of 'er," said a voice, "else ——," the man waved his hand, descriptively painting the end.

The watch stared from their new vantage

place upon the fife-rails, and saw their companion heeling, leaning over, clad in foam. For perhaps a minute she remained thus, in full view, then snow drove over the pair, and again the wind *motif* rose—a dull note.

The *Manitou* was enveloped now in a shroud which effectually hid her from criticism. The horizon had narrowed down to a small circle through which the *Juggernaut's* bow protruded —a pounding U-shaped wedge lifting in spume.

"It's the sun-up squall," said a grey-haired man, who stood staring sidelong at the driving snow.

"Late then," another commented.

"The squall as scoffed the *Redjacket's* free t'gallen-m'sts," the man insisted, solemn of visage, blinking at the snow. "I know," he added, "for I wer' in 'er."

No one had any objection to urge. They were "standing by," and it seemed quite possible, judging by the lines on the old fellow's face.

"We wer' runnin' down the Eastin'," he announced without emotion, "doin' fourteen if we're doin' one, an' all sail's on us. It's

blowin, you may bet yer boots on that, an' our free skys'ls wer' set—when along comes this-yer sun-up squall. The old man cocks his eye aloft, an' sez to the mate, 'Give 'er bell-tinker, mister,' an' goes away down out of it. 'Give her bell-tinker it is, sir,' sez the mate.

"Then the snow drives over us, an' we 'oozed. Like bein' in a bloomin' drain, it was; but we never lowered nuffing. Couldn't. Halliards locked fore an' aft an' the old man's got the key in his pocket—see? But," said the man with a sweep of reminiscence, "we 'ad a crew as could scoff 'er. Lord! we 'ad a crew . . . not like to us, or 'im," he jerked his thumb to indicate the vanished *Manitou*, "but a crowd as could eat 'er—if so be t'wer' necessary.

"Bime-by that squall passed, an' the old man pokes 'is 'ead out of 'is shell, as you might say. He cocks 'is eye up aloft. 'Ullo!' ee sez, quiet like, 'wot's come of our free t'gallen-m'sts, mister?'"

"Then the mate cocks *'is* eye up aloft. Ee looks more than a minute, then ee turns to the old man 'an sez, 'I guess,' ee sez, 'that sun-up squall hez scoffed 'em.'

"An' it 'ad," the old sailor asserted, stolidly eyeing the snow. "It took 'em all—lock, stock an' barrel. I know, fer I'm one o' them as went up to see. Mast'eads razzeed clean off, same as if you-d cut 'em wiv a sawr. Nuffin' left. 'Alliards unrove, gear unrove —all cleaned out, an' we never 'eard so much as damn-it.

"That," said the man, as he moved to get tighter grip, "was a sun-up squall in a ship as could stand 'em. This," he waved one hand, "is anovver, in one as can't. You can bet high on that."

His voice failed. A new gloom had fallen upon the racing vessel, a gloom which suddenly became darkness. The snow streamed horizontally between the masts—and from the poop came the order which brings all sailors into action—

"Let go the tops'l halliards! Smart's the word!"

A grinding squeal of running chain, a war of canvas and the long, minor chant of Merchant Jack as he lay back upon the gear—those were the sounds that made way amidst the turmoil of slatting sails. Snow, hail, seas

—a blinding mixture sent by the Force which stood over them, threatened the end; then a ripped sheet and the thunder aloft increased, the wind note triumphant.

A voice on the poop broke in upon it, saying very sternly—

"Steady with her, there! Keep your luff." Again, still more urgently, "Steady! Steady! You'll shake the guts out of her. Steady with your helm!"

And the wind note multiplied a hundredfold, screamed in the murk, striving to drown the thunder of a mainsail and two topsails blowing to ribbons somewhere up there where the snow whirled and the hail made music. A giant sea raised head close to windward, the crest spitting fury, and again there came that calm voice from the poop—

"Another hand to the wheel, there! One hand forward! Look out for that ship . . . steady lad . . . steady now!" And after a minute of watching, "Look out for yourselves down there!"

Five men and three boys remained now to tend this grain-ship unless the still lord who commanded her chose to call all hands. They

faced their task unconscious of what came; unconscious as the giant ship which had stooped to greet that greybeard of which they had been warned. They clung to the gear, twisted their legs and arms about it and looked round. The squall towered and they swung back, wind-driven and tangled in the ropes to which they clung.

A rush, a grunt, and the *Juggernaut* dug with her nose at the slope of that advancing mass; a lurch, a sudden trip, and the sea whelmed her, filling her to the rail, hammering at her houses, gutting them.

Dead? Scarcely. Winged? In one pinion. Crew safe? In part . . . but out there in the spume to leeward two waved arms passing the way of all sailor-men; and ahead, a trifle on the weather bow the loom of a ship—the *Manitou*.

She stooped as the *Juggernaut* stooped, only her angle was more acute. She heeled, dipping yard-arms and scooping the seas. She lay in the trough they had sucked out there in the gloom; a ship on her beam-end, carrying her crew and her grain drunkenly in the wilderness. She lay inert, an obstacle suddenly

prepared for the *Juggernaut* to leap, to scrape over, to escape as she might.

"Up helm! Hard over!"

The still form dominating this charging ship seemed to vibrate with sudden energy, yet it made no move. The commander lifted one hand, emphasizing his order, looked round to see it obeyed, that is all. But at the back of his mind he knew that if the *Manitou* recovered, then the *Juggernaut* might throw up the sponge. Nothing could save her. The *Manitou* was too close—and, were not the pair of them built of steel?

These two ships, which had come together only with the dawn, had swiftly closed in the stress of the squall. So close were they that now the end appeared. Half an hour ago they had laughed at each other's capers, had been content, perhaps, to back their own. Without any preliminary they had become friends, ready when the Horn was passed to chat, if the weather were kind, or to signal with flags. Now, suddenly they were enemies. The survivor of them, if one survived, would be compelled to stand his trial at the courts. They were at war already. Words, deeds,

actions, must be noted. What, each cried, in God's Name was that other doing that he had blundered so near? Were her skipper and officers blithering idiots, or were they asleep? Couldn't they see where they were going? If they steered as it was evident they had steered, what in the world . . . The questions trailed off into blasphemy. And the end was before them. Perhaps the end of both. In such a sea anything might happen. Phut! It was a toss up . . . . a toss up.

The ships were of steel. A blow on the gaunt side the *Juggernaut* lifted so brazenly to the winds, and she would crack like a bottle. In five minutes there would be no *Juggernaut* . . . no *Manitou* — yet the commanders standing there, gauging possibilities, scarcely stirred.

There came a heavier gust, and with it, in a moment, the tension lapsed. The *Juggernaut's* master stood with bared head acknowledging it.

The *Manitou* had ceased to move. She lay down in the smother. Her sails no longer scooped, they pulsed in the seas which had conquered her. Hen-coops, buckets, life-

buoys, suddenly littered the sea, bobbing and oscillating in the gloom. Small figures appeared climbing the ship's rail as she turned over. The men still clinging to the *Juggernaut's* gear saw them. Their voices rose in prayer. Voices from the *Juggernaut* joined in the shout —but the wind-roar carried the sound to leeward, away from those marionette forms which crawled on the shell-like hull and clung there watching.

One dizzy moment they remained poised, then fell away before the rush of a greybeard which creamed over them, smote the *Juggernaut*, and passed hissing into the wilderness.

When next men were able to use their eyes, a white sheet lay sizzling in the path of their vessel, and the *Manitou* had created a new position for those who methodically star our wreck-charts.

II

UP THE SLOPE

THE *Juggernaut* with her gutted houses and her crew picnicking, as the phrase goes, in sail-rooms and bo'sun's store-room, crept away from Cape Horn and steadily lifted the sun. A week ago its rays gave no more heat than the moon, and were as white. A week ago the greybeards of the implacable south still chased them, creamed over the rail and banged drearily from side to side as the ship rolled; but now under the driving force of a gale straight from the pole, it was possible to bring out wet clothes, sodden sea-boots and oilskins and string them up aloft to dry. On Sunday, ten days after rounding Diego Ramirez, Captain Mason, marching the poop in high feather, declared that the ship looked like a junk-shop for'ard; but rubbed his hands when the mate became explanatory. "True, true," he said. "I am not picking holes. I am just noting facts. She looks, perhaps, more like the beach of a seaside town after the folk have done bathing."

He marched two turns in silence then again halted beside the mate to add—

"Middle of August, Carter. Everybody is at the seaside up our way, enjoying themselves getting wet. A few days ago we couldn't get dry when we were wet . . . rather a difference—what? I remember it was the same with me once—long ago, of course—and with you, no doubt. Neither of us were happy, I I dare swear, if we weren't wet to the arm-pits in August. Lord! What days those were!"

He walked on without waiting for the chief's comment. He was in high feather, a fair wind booming and a spell of decent weather on the horizon of things. The loss of that ship which had so nearly wrecked his own was already set in its place as a memory, an incident from which experience is drawn. The progress made by the *Juggernaut* was now the first consideration. He acknowledged it, standing a moment to watch the wake as it boiled and twisted away there to the south. And the *Juggernaut* dragged her load up the slope with the gait of a team proud of the effort which had brought them so far. True, another hill loomed in the distance; but if they had accomplished that

part of the journey which was always boggy and rugged and seamed with great furrows, they would surely accomplish the rest—especially that fine section where the sun was warm and the breezes soft to tired eyes.

The ship reeled off steadily her eight knots, rising, when a squall struck her, to nine and ten. The men brought out what clothes they had saved when their house was gutted, dried and patched and hung them in the rigging. They moved sedately up the home stretch contemplating garments in half section, ballooning filled with wind.

They had forgotten Cape Stiff, its greybeards, the ice and snow of that dismal tract they had passed, and were busy forecasting the day when the docks would hold the old *Juggernaut* and they would be free. They planned what they would do with their freedom. It would be great! No freedom at any time would be like this which would be theirs. October would do the trick, they decided, early with the help of a few policemen, late without. What did it matter? More days more dollars. The old man would see they didn't lose time: so would the *Juggernaut*, that sly witch that was

snaking it like a dolphin, or the barracoota that were under the bows this morning.

They were jubilant, too, and explanatory over the claims which some one must satisfy. It stood to reason they must not be the losers of what they had lost. Their chests and duds had gone when the house went. Only a few rags remained, and they had been compelled in consequence to buy at the "slop chest" things to carry them home. They looked upon the matter with calm eyes. It should mean a new outfit at the very least; new donkey, new shore-going togs, new bowler or slouch, new ducks and dungaree for further voyaging—they called it South Spaining. They made out in crabbed writing lists of the "things" lost, things acquired at sea prices to replace them, things which may have existed—books, papers, telescopes, instruments and other imaginative traps which, on leaving Oregon, were theirs. And they came one evening in the quiet at the end of the Trades, to a booming as of guns far off in the nor'-west.

At six o'clock, when the sun was dipping they saw silhouetted against its glow, two shapes which stood out pounding one at the other

across its disc. Two far-away blue wedges with pin-like masts and puffs of smoke which melted into the blob which hung above them. That surprised the men. Watch below and watch on deck took their fill of the sight, questioning what it all meant. And when the sun, red and angry at the noise, had gone out and the darkness of a starless night wrapped them, the boom still trembled in the air, caught the great yards and masts of the *Juggernaut* and jarred them. Flashes came now in place of the silhouettes and lambent smoke. But the jar went on, the thud of steel drumming on slings and ties up there where the sails drew curves against the night.

The old grey-haired sailor who had seen the sunrise squall which had "scoffed the *Red Jacket's* free t'gall'n-m'sts," drew on his powers as he sat with his mates on the fo'c's'le head. It was the second dog-watch. Pipes were alight and pannikins of half-cold tea stood on deck beside them.

"'Nuther revalution," he declaimed. "Some one collarin' the President like as not. Can't do nothin' in Souf America wivout revalutions. I know. I were in one once."

A young boy, one of the afterguard, drew near and gave him the necessary impetus: "Tell us, Charlie," he begged. "Did they hang him out of the Cathedral window like they did in Lima?"

"No," said Charley, "they didn't 'ang 'im. 'Anging's off. We took 'im out to sea in a tramp called the *Merveelouse*, a Frenchman belongin' to Haver that they had collared, wiv us that were in her, an 'held 'im to ransom——"

"Who did?" asked the boy, drinking at the font.

"The parties that revalutioned," said the old man. "A gang of 'em came on board to do the bargainin'. It was werf somethin' to 'ear 'em. They kep' 'im a prisoner, arm an' leg irons, an' they dressed 'im down each mornin' wiv rattans, like uz-if ee were a boy instead of a thumpin' fat man an' the head of the fishiest State in Souf America.

"We 'ad wireless of course, they saw to that. So twice a day we had the two parties on toast ashore. One was biddin' in thousands fer us to dump 'im overboard, the other was offerin' the world an' all to get 'im back.

"An 'undred an' fifty-five thousand was the

price paid by the party that wanted him back, an' we took it. Lasted an 'ole fortnight did that raffle, an' I never see a man so glad to get quit of a ship in my time, as that yellow-faced dollup of fat as was the President of the half of Souf America . . . so they *said*."

Salvoes punctuated the old man's speech. The chain slings and ties jarred with each discharge. Flashes lighted their distance carrying death to unknown fighters ; yet the interest for these men lay in the question the boy put—

"Was it dollars or pounds, if you please ?"

"Pounds," said Charley, without a blink.

"There's not a man in this world or the next," a new voice proclaimed, "that is worth so much money to any one—let alone a Dago."

"Ee wasn't a Dago, ee was a Square 'ead," old Charley asserted.

"Then I wouldn't 'a' wiped my shoes on him," said the voice. "Ullo ! Wot's up now ?"

There was silence at this. Both forward and aft men stared at the flame that suddenly shot up, far out there where flashes had leaped and stung.

"Somebody's gone west," said the fo'c's'le. "Lumme! I'd give somethin' to know who."

"Blown up," said Captain Mason to the chief. "Magazines hit by the look of it. Eyah! I wonder who is at war now?"

"When we left Oregon there was talk of trouble between the States and Mexico," the chief suggested.

"And there was the Balkan hullabaloo," Mason interjected. "But they have no fleets that I know of. It's a puzzle. It was a fight right enough, a regular set to, if I know anything of ships and guns. I wonder who it was!"

"We shall find out when we get home, sir," the chief decided as his commander went below. But they discovered something before daylight.

It was at three in the morning watch, the darkest hour of a black night, when the second mate first caught sight of a light that blinked rapidly a message he could not read. He could take the letters: but they spelled no words. Another light he presently discovered was blinking to leeward: yet, on neither hand were any signal lamps. For all that appeared

it might have been lightning, or will-o'-the-wisp—something uncanny and flustering. He sent down to report, and presently the old man stood on the top stair of the companion in his pyjamas, staring first to starboard, then to port. The sea was a mirror which mocked the *Juggernaut* with fleeting glimpses of fire.

"Where away?" he asked at length. "I can see nothing."

"It was plain enough just now, sir."

"But there are no sidelights, nothing to suggest a ship. Are you sure?"

"I'd stake my life on it, sir."

"Hum!" said Mason. Then he reached into the companion for a coat, put it on and came on deck. "We seem to be getting mixed up," he complained, "in some sort of game." He yawned openly. "I was nicely asleep too. Eyah!!" Again he yawned. Then he stretched and sat on the companion, swinging one bare foot.

A sudden, blinding glare disturbed the pair, and the captain looked round, twisted and screened his eyes. "A searchlight," he announced angrily. "What the devil do they want with them here?" he shouted aloud.

"Swing the thing round or switch off. Can't you see you are blinding us?" and knew that he was talking through his hat. He was certain now that a ship was at hand, though a moment ago he had decided that the *Juggernaut* toyed with the mirror alone.

Down the path of light came the hiss of a vessel moving swiftly, the roll of machinery and a sudden gong clamour. Then a voice hailed in the formula of the sea—

"Ship ahoy! What ship is that?"

There was a burr in the pronunciation which suggested Scotland. Captain Mason seized a megaphone and replied—

"*Juggernaut* of Liverpool. What ship is that?"

"*H.M.S. Highflyer.* Where are you from and where bound?"

"Oregon. Ninety-five days out. Queenstown for orders."

"Right. Back your main yard. I am sending a boat alongside."

Captain Mason responded. He was brusque because he considered the order trenched on his position as Master: but he obeyed. He was accustomed to look with reverence on

vessels who wore the magic letters before their names. *H.M.S. Highflyer*, eh? Well, but what in the world was he after down here, without lights, too, holding ships up as though he had the right. Was this an explanation of last night's fight? Perhaps. He turned to the mate and said quietly, "All hands on deck. Back the main yard."

In ten minutes the *Juggernaut* had gone to sleep on the glassy sea, and when she was quiet and snug a cutter arrived carrying a lieutenant and sixteen sturdy sailors. The officer and two men climbed the small ladder.

"Morning, Captain," said the lieutenant. "Let me see the ship's papers, will you?"

Captain Mason acknowledged the salute, and replied, "Certainly; but, may I ask, sir, what is the meaning of it all?"

"All what?"

"Last night's fight, for instance, and now this."

"Last night," the officer chuckled, "we sank a Fritz raider, who would have sunk you if we hadn't been handy."

"Fritz?" Mason interjected. "I don't pretend to understand. I am ninety odd days out

and have seen nothing I could speak till now. What is going on?"

"War," said the officer. Then he struck a match and lighted a cigarette.

"And are we in it?"

"Very much in it." He blew a cloud and stared at the red end of his cigarette. "It's England, France and Russia *v.* Germany and Austria, with Italy and Turkey sitting on the fence."

The captain drew a long breath: "That's a big job," he suggested.

"Biggest since Nelson's day . . . going to give them socks, though. Our men are over in France helping to hold the fort. What fort? Oh, France and Belgium generally while Russia gets up steam. We weren't ready—any of us. Never are. But we," he alluded to the Navy, with a sweep of his hand, "are keeping the seas free while K. of K. makes an army. Quick—papers, please, I must toddle."

He entered the cabin rolling out details of actions and villainies that were on the lips of all the world, saw the papers, scribbled some directions and passed glowing into his boat.

And the *Juggernaut* headed for the island

that awaited her grain. The Navy had taken her under its wing. She would be shepherded, docketed, and passed from outpost to outpost, as though she were a parcel and the post office had acknowledged the receipt.

III

UNDER FIRE

Homeward now with a new impetus to stir them, legends to consider, snippets of conversation filtered through the brain of a steward who bid fair to outdo Münchhausen, to harass them. Homeward without lights, with a new code of signals and a Morse lamp which somebody must learn to flash. Homeward at a snail's pace through latitudes which had forgotten the trick of steadiness and produced wind which was gusty, baffling, light, all in a day; because, forsooth, orders had been given that the *Juggernaut* should cross the line where ships never crossed it, look for Trades where least she might expect to find them, and keeping to the westward avoid the western islands as though the Huns had garrisoned them and the seas were mined.

So they came up the long trail from the south, caught Trades which bustled them west, until it seemed they must sight Bermuda, and here again a cruiser held them up, gave them

instructions and told them of the loss of the *Cressy*, *Aboukir* and *Hogue*. That made them gasp ; but the manner of their loss made them angry. It seemed as the cruiser vanished and the *Juggernaut* bent once more to the breeze that blows would presently fall out here in defence of chivalry, even as in France.

England was at war with Germany. That thought throbbed to the exclusion of all others. But Germany, it seemed, was not fighting as a man should. She was running wild, using weapons and means that no man would use. That made them savage. The Squareheads who were on board went warily, for they were in a minority, and the British inclined to resent their presence. Von Schmidt was the exception here, a man with a bullet head and a neck which gave the same circumference.

England had no army it was true ; but she was engaged in the task of making one. More power to her elbow, that was the cry of these men who knew the Squarehead for what he was. England played the game, but she had lost in one short hour the *Cressy*, *Aboukir* and *Hogue* to one of those new-fangled sneaking boats they called submarines. That thrilled

them. It bred a fight up there on the fo'c's'le head one night when the *Juggernaut* was nosing about in the dark, seeking a breeze. A *Conway* boy from the half-deck and von Schmidt from the port fo'c's'le were the protagonists. Von Schmidt had been heard to brag of this adventure and old Charley had taken him up. He was talking to him like a Dutch uncle, as he said, when Conway came through the night to challenge him.

"You say it's fair game to torpedo chaps when they are trying to save their pals?" he shouted, flinging off his coat.

"Ja—that iss so. It iss our way ven ve fight. It vos good pizness."

"You are a liar and a coward!" quoth Conway.

"That iss mine own pizness."

"And this is mine," Conway remarked, in that still fashion that he had learned on the Mersey. Then he knocked von Schmidt down, stripped off his shirt and stood waiting.

"Get up!" He stirred him with his foot.

And von Schmidt rose. He was heavier, older than the boy; but the boy had science and von Schmidt had none. After fifteen

minutes' milling the "Dutchman" refused to rise and Conway stood over him like a bantam.

"Say it was damned cowardly!" he demanded.

"I say it," said von Schmidt.

"Out loud so that the chaps can hear you."

And von Schmidt, whose other name was Goldstein, repeated the words without shame. Then Conway went down and put his head in a bucket of water, and made ready for two hours at the wheel. He could scarcely see the binnacle, and he grinned painfully when the chief commented on his atrocious management of a course which should be meticulous in war-time. He promised to do better, and the mate eyeing him sidelong asked: "Who have you been fighting?" learned after some fencing, and remarked: "Good boy! By the Lord I wish I had had the job."

He strode up and down rubbing his hands. That made Conway glow.

. . . . . .

They came in the second week of October to a circle on the chart from which they had been told it was permissible to make a bee-

line for home. They turned there, singing joyously on the braces. Home at last! It seemed close. The very act of steering for it after all these twistings, put them in touch with the essential fervour. England had never seemed so beautiful. Now that difficulty stood in the shape of mines, torpedoes and shell-fire, it became the more necessary to enjoy her. They did not know they were what is called patriotic; they knew simply that home lay over there in the east, that the boys were mustering round Kitchener's banner, making ready to fight for their King. That thrilled them. Once it had been otherwise, they had been snubbed for patriotism, scarcely permitted to hoist their flag, and all the while they had been in touch with Squareheads who lorded it over them mouthing stupidities about race exhaustion, fear, decadence. They scarcely recognized the terms; but they knew that in some undefined fashion it meant that England was on the down grade, and that hurt. It was the reason that produced that encounter on the fo'c's'le head. It was race antagonism, the result of years of competition, espionage, and hog-like pushing for the trough.

Things and impressions, these, which they had learned on the seas which were their home ; which had been whispered, then shouted into ears attuned always for news ; which had arrived by way of the press and chatter of America, Australia, wherever they sailed, west, east, or south. It had grown acute during the period when England warred in South Africa ; when, it seemed, all the world was leagued together to brand us impotent. It had been dinned in bars and dance-houses, in street and on shipboard—the Old Country was done, tired, played out. The thing had been reiterated till the red flush of shame had gathered and thousands had fallen away, taken new citizenship and guessed and bragged like the bucko iconoclasts of the States. But now a period was set. England was at war.

So far the Navy had kept faith with them, shepherding them, smiling at their sluggish march. The Navy, it appeared, knew the *Juggernaut* quite as well as her crew knew her ; had seen her grassy sides and marvelled that she moved at all ; but now, since they had squared away for the run home the Navy had been invisible. They were sorry for that.

They had grown accustomed to see the grey hulls popping up and coming to greet them. They missed the news they gave, diluted and censored as it was, they missed the new comradeship which had been born of this war; the acknowledgment at last, that, the Mercantile Marine was an admitted safeguard. That was splendid. It gave a new colour to all their work.

Yesterday a couple of trawlers had steamed past, punching into the breeze which kept the *Juggernaut* humming; but the men who had prattled of the *Red Jacket's* "free t'gall'n-m'sts," and the revolutions of South America did not connect them with the Navy. They wondered stolidly what fishermen were doing so far from home, and hazarded a guess that they were going to fill up on the Banks because of the difficulty of fishing nearer.

Then on a day when they drew down to the Irish Coast, they heard the thunder of guns so distant, that they wondered what sort of luck had permitted the Squareheads to get so far west. They babbled over this for an hour, saw more trawlers and confessed they were done. At noon a destroyer vomiting

smoke from four funnels came full tilt from the east and halted a moment alongside to ask had they seen anything of the enemy. The *Juggernaut* had seen nothing and said so. "But we heard gun fire out west," Captain Mason added; "it went on for an hour. Is there any news?"

"None. We are after one of his cruisers. Seems to have got through though. Make the best of your breeze in to the land, Captain, if you want to see it."

And he was off, dancing into a sea that tried to swallow him. He moved in a Niagara of spray, leaping like the cars on a switchback.

If they wanted to see home! They whispered the officer's phrase, staring at the dim seascape, wondering, thrilled. At last they were in touch with the war. They talked incessantly of it, reiterating the facts they had gleaned. They longed for the speed of that destroyer and questioned whether the Navy would have any use for them when they got in. They had been pushed here and prodded there, told how to steer and how to run with a *sang-froid* and detachment which was new and immensely alluring. There had been hints

of raiders and submarines. Captain Mason knew just how much and how little to pass on to the crew, and he succeeded in keeping them enthusiastic. He had been told among other things, that if he had an opportunity, he must sink any enemy ship, and he looked at the dim bulk of this grain-carrier and acknowledged her power, end on.

But he was not prepared for what happened.

For some time a dense blob of smoke had lain over the eastern horizon in the direction of the Channel. It had grown suddenly out of nothing, far off, and shortly after the destroyer had passed them. It was a smoke blotch similar in character to that made by the destroyer, but very much denser. Captain Mason decided when his attention had been drawn to it that it must be the smoke of a squadron, and again became engrossed in the details of sailing. The yards required a small check. The foresail would draw better if the weather clew of the mainsail were lifted and the crossjack furled. There ensued an interval given over to the men's song as they hauled, and at the end of it all hands clustered in the waist to watch that growing cloud of smoke.

It was nearer already by six or seven miles. They began to pick out the funnels that threw it, to count them. Two or three were on the leading ship, the rest astern. They decided presently there were three if not four vessels astern, destroyers or cruisers, then quite suddenly the leading ship fired. That made them silent. They could not tell where the shells fell; they only knew they did not come near the *Juggernaut*. The excitement became intense. Here they were in the middle of it, listening to the thud of guns, watching the flashes. They guessed it was an enemy ship chased by some of ours and knew that they would pass within a stone's-throw unless the old man jibbed—so they put it, leaning out praying for a chance to see the end.

The vessels which were astern made no reply, only their smoke cloud became blacker, more detached from that of the leading vessel. It was wonderful and very grim—a race for life, there could be no doubt about that. And as they formulated their theories twin puffs of greenish smoke lighted momentarily by tongues of flame leaped forth; and far, far astern two columns of water lifted without

sound into the air. The men rubbed hands and broke into a cheer. Instinctively they had come to understand that this vessel which approached at such speed, was the enemy ship about which the destroyer had inquired with so much feeling.

Then suddenly came an order from the poop to spoil their jubilation. Captain Mason snapped it as he shut his glass and the chief hurried forward reiterating the cry. "Starboard fore brace, there. Smart's the word," and the men sprang to their task nodding one to the other. "Good. The old man's sized her up. German! Mind your eye, sonny. Give it lip there some one." Then, to their song, quietly, speedily the yards were trimmed and the ship hauled out with the wind on her beam. They remarked, as they hauled, a new blob of smoke towering high to port, and they knew that meant a vessel steaming with the wind, heading towards Channel.

The *Juggernaut* sizzled onward throwing cascades of spray. She liked the change. She acknowledged that it was her best way out and under the press of canvas she carried she could reel off nine or ten quite easily. Tacks

were boarded, sheets hauled home, jigger clad in sails which bellied from gaff and boom. She lay down to it humming and again the men clustered to leeward watching their enemy.

There was no doubt in their minds now. They could see the three great funnels towering above tier upon tier of decks. She was an armed cruiser, one of the Atlantic Liners, Captain Mason decided in confab with his chief, and she could steam twenty five or six knots an hour. She had the heels of those who followed, she could drive into a sea too, as they could not. He moved anxiously up and down the poop, his eyes on the sails alternately with the chase, and a moment later gave orders for the men to take cover.

He had noticed a small alteration in the cruiser's course, nothing more; then a shell struck the water a cable's length astern and he took up his glasses to examine the smoke blotch which approached to port. He nodded to the chief, "Yes, you were right, it is our friend of this morning. Coming full tilt too." Again he compared distances. It seemed posisible she would reach the *Juggernaut* as soon as the enemy; but meanwhile they would

have to run the gauntlet of German shells. The ethics of frightfulness scarcely touched him. He knew very little about it, he only knew that Squareheads were the devil, meet them where you would. A second shell came to advise him of tactics about which all the world talked; he saw that it passed over them and decided that the fellow's elevation was faulty. It was followed by one which cut away a fore-topmast backstay and left a humming all down the spar; but the mast held. It was of steel, one with the lowermast, and while all hands gazed considering this outrage, a shell fell amidst the pump gear and two of those who had craned out to watch lay writhing on the deck.

The captain looked over, calling to the mate: "Get them in the cabin, Carter, and see what you can do for them. Make the men stay in cover."

Flags caught his eye fluttering to the raider's yard-arm. He fetched his code and read out: "Heave to or I will sink you. And," he commented grimly diagnosing the situation, "if I heave to you will sink me."

He closed his glass, crossed to the signal

locker and with the help of two whom he summoned, hoisted flags which said: "I will see you," then spelled slowly and laboriously, "damned first," and set the red ensign at the peak.

"Cut that down if you can," he growled. "If I am not a thousand miles out, one of our destroyers is dancing along to cut you off."

Again he moved slowly up and down before the helmsman.

The *Juggernaut* leaned over heavily pressed, towards the land and humming like a top newly set spinning. She seemed to know what was required of her and bent to her task jovially.

"Let her have it, skip!" came from the throats of those who watched. "Give her all she knows!" Then a shell reached which pierced the ship's side forward and they hurried to see its handiwork. A wisp of smoke at once appeared from the scuttle, and when the carpenter returned from his burrowing match in the fore-peak he announced that she was holed. "Got us just fore-side the bulkhead, sir. She's a-fire and you could pass a bucket through the hole they've made."

"Good," said his commander, "tell the second mate to get the head pump rigged and put the hose on her." He added as an after-thought: "Clear away the boats aft here, a couple of hands. We may as well be ready in case anything should happen."

The men cheered. Was their ship not drawing away? Was not the raider twisting on her helm, too? Possibly he had sighted the column of smoke rising out there in the west, perhaps he considered he had already cooked the goose. But the *Juggernaut* was not yet out of range. Half a dozen shells came her way and one of them got the ship's short bowsprit. It was the raider's last shot as she turned and made off at full speed for the south, and with the crash it made, the *Juggernaut's* fore-topmast came down quite gracefully and took up a position alongside.

Captain Mason scarcely stirred; he seized his megaphone and gave a new order: "Forward there! Let go t'gallant and royal halliards, main and mizzen. Clue them up!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered the chief whose hands already were full in all conscience.

"One watch go on with the pumping, the

other aft to shorten sail!" the commander added.

He luffed to ease the pressure, watching, still, in spite of the strain he endured. He could not call for assistance as men do in these days of wireless telegraphy; he must fight for his own life and the ship's. The grain he carried was wanted at home and presently would be worth treble its value, unless ships could run the gauntlet and bring it through in safety. He was unaware that the Navy, which seemed to have deserted him, was even at that moment sending out messages which would bring him aid. He turned to watch the raider, acknowledging that she had scored; but that great vessel had lost interest in the *Juggernaut* and was bent on escape, smoke driving from her funnels, plunging, smothered in spray. From his own ship came the cry of men carrying out orders which he had given, snugging up the sails, and crossing the stern were those three cruisers, heading hell for leather in the wake of the flying raider. It would have been good to watch them; but he dared spare only a passing glance. He saw the leader of them fire and wondered whether

at that range it was possible to do much. He refused conjecture; noted the fact and continued as before, conning his ship, nursing her as only a master can.

The royals and topgallant-sails presently hung in their gear and he saw the mate lead his small group forward to commence, with axes and cold chisels, the work of cutting away the spars which trailed alongside. The ship moved easily now; but she was down by the head, dipping in a fashion that troubled him. She was holed badly forward; yet it was possible the mast and bowsprit would cause even greater damage than that wrought by the shell. By supreme good luck, or the grace of God, that had taken effect foreside the bulkhead instead of abaft it. He acknowledged the mercy in the quiet fashion which comes to men of the sea when in the presence of peril. It might have been worse—easily it might have been worse.

From time to time messengers came to report progress. They announced that they were holding their own; that the fire no longer raged but smouldered, the bulkhead standing finely; and after a while the mate

sent word that the spars were lying cannily alongside and would soon be cut out of her. Under the captain's eye two of the boys worked preparing boats; provisioning them, filling the small breakers with fresh water, taking covers off the sails, putting oars, tiller, boat-hooks in readiness for the last lap, if it came to that. Things were shaping better than he had dared to expect. As he had lifted his cap when the *Manitou* no longer lay in his path, so he lifted it now; but with no thrill of anguish for the men he could do nothing to save. He looked astern and saw the raider melting into the haze, the three who followed dashing in her wake. That was fine. He noticed, too, a signal fluttering on the yard of the leading cruiser and read it. "Ship ahoy!" it said on the one hand; "Are you in immediate danger?" on the other. Captain Mason realized that the question had long been hoisted and hurriedly replied with a single flag: "No."

He felt the thrill that comes to those who are prepared to give blows as he pulled it aloft. Fine! Fine! He would have exchanged at that moment his command for a chance to

work the guns on the ship which first came up with the raider; then back to earth, to the humdrum business of getting this cargo home, and to greet the second mate who arrived post haste with a message.

"The fore peak is full of water, sir," he announced, "and she is dipping so badly we can't get at the head gear to cut it away. I am afraid I shall lose somebody if I put them over the side."

The commander recognized this.

"Quite. We can open the sluice a trifle," he said tentatively, "and drain it out with the main pumps, if you think we can keep it under."

"I think we can, sir—if——"

"Good. I will lay the main yard aback and see what we can do. *She* won't trouble us any more." He referred to the raider, far off now on her run for freedom. "I would have done it sooner, but those spars are better trailing alongside than jabbing at us while we are hove to. Wait. Get rid of the topmast first, then have a sail ready to pull over the hole and I will bring her round."

For an hour they cut and prised, clinging to the gear and to the rails, working in water

which strove to flatten them out, to wash them from their lashings, to crush them with those giant spars which lifted and surged with every thrust of the sea. The sun sank to the horizon, the sky became overcast and glum ; the wind moaned over them and with it came squalls of ice-cold rain to force them to their knees. It made their task more perilous. At one time it seemed that wind and sea had joined hands and the *Juggernaut* would follow in the path of the *Manitou ;* but help was on the way, coming swiftly through the twilight, marvellously summoned when help from anywhere seemed impossible.

Three of the mosquito fleet, the trawler fleet if that be plainer, called by the cruisers as they swept out in chase, came tumbling and rusty to see what passed. They came direct, not by intuition or guess-work, nor by the law which produces a tug when salvage is in the air ; but by methodic ordering. "Out there," said the message, "in something north and something west, one hundred and fifty-three miles west by south of Cape Clear, is a sailing vessel dismasted and in danger. Go to her assistance." And they were there.

Rusty, with numbers painted large on their bows, net and trawls vanished, and in their place curious slides as for some unknown game, they came and asked no questions. With buoys and other oddments stacked on deck, bundles of cork, lifebuoys and chunks of wood lying haphazard on hatch and fiddley; with aerials twisting aloft and men wearing the badges of His Majesty's Naval Service, they brushed through the seas, like steeplechasers on a closely hurdled course, and came. Smudged white ensigns flicked at their mast-head, proudly declaring their character; flicked as they drove through the Atlantic haze, flicked when those who set them aloft came down beside the *Juggernaut*, and, halting there, asked simply for orders.

Captain Mason was not the man to look a gift horse in the face, or to bargain with the white ensign. Had that ensign been of red, he would have moved more slowly; as it was, he cried out, "Glad to see you! Come on board and lend a hand to clear away the gear and plug that shell hole."

That set the white ensigns fluttering. Shell hole, eh! These men knew something of

shells and mines and many other devilments. They asked no questions, but got into their boats and a dozen braw fishermen climbed on board, melted into the two watches, and helped to make things hum.

Two hours later a procession was trailing beneath the flying scud ; two trawlers ahead, the *Juggernaut*, with her stern in the air and her nose down, following ; and aft another trawler to give her a jerk if she failed to steer as she should. As a matter of fact, the *Juggernaut* trusted entirely to the pluck of that gentleman who hung on her quarter, could not port or starboard without his aid, and an hour before dawn slobbered shamelessly past Haulbowline and reached a breathing place.

She had been much agitated. She had lost men and spars. Her maker would scarcely have known her had she happened on that far-away north-eastern yard that had fashioned her. But she arrived, sent her dead ashore to the sound of muffled drums and the march that wails, sad as the pipers of the north, and came back to sit down and learn the news. To find out why England was at war ; to discover what those queer slides on the trawler's decks were

for, and to hear miraculous stories of escapes from mines and submarines, and the method adopted by the Admiralty to fight them.

They learned all about Belgium, and Mons, and the new armies which were marching over there in England with dummy rifles and broom handles for arms. They learned of Germany's rush on Calais, and the desperate stand made by our men to hold him back. They heard, too, for the first time, of "the contemptible little army," and they marched the decks deciding what each man of them would do. "Contemptible!" The phrase stung.

Later in the day a gang arrived who took the ship once more by the nose, put a hose down her fore-peak, and drained her dry in an hour. Then came people with plates and ratchets and a wonderful medley of tools and iron and forges. People who started making a clatter at once, drilling holes, hammering, blowing iron red hot: who presently screwed a plate down upon the hole the shell had torn, caulked it, and pronounced the *Juggernaut* water-tight, ready to be tackled by the high-powered tug that lay off snorting and bubbling impatience.

And again they took her by the nose and plucked her forth to dock in Liverpool, where, it appeared, there were stevedores and others ready to suck the grain out of her which had cost her so many throes.

And that, if any further word be required, was how a cargo of wheat from Oregon reached England in the early days of her trial ; how her crew held out against odds while the men in Flanders stood in ice-cold water holding back the Hun.

HOLDING THE BLUE RIBBON

"Eighty-two fathoms, sir . . . fine grey sand and shell," said the quartermaster of the watch. He carried in his hand the last specimen drawn from the bed of the Atlantic. He stood at the salute, holding forth the tallow armouring for the commander to examine.

"Ha! Thank you. Very good."

The answer fell sharply, and the quartermaster disappeared with his evidence, to register it and lay it on the flag locker.

Captain Fitzgerald moved up and down the bridge revolving this announcement in his mind. He knew precisely how much he might value it, how far he might depend upon it and escape censure, if . . . "Eighty-two fathoms, grey sand and shell—Umm!" The knowledge oppressed him. It rilled in a brain usually clear, usually prompt to act. "Eighty-two fathoms . . . it was . . . Pish! It was con-

spiracy, fraud. Nature's handicap sent to try him. Sand and shell . . . sand and shell."

Captain Fitzgerald crossed to the wing of the bridge and stood there thinking. His officers saw him pass, and one half met him, as though expecting an order. It did not come.

A greyhound of the Atlantic hummed beneath these people, carrying the mail to England. From every nerve and fibre came a hint of the tension—pistons throbbing, steam sizzling, pumps clucking. The buzz of dynamos came up to them, the roar of furnaces, the roll of turbines churning yeast. And far beneath, out there where the gale held revel, the seas chased their ship with hands of fire. Great blobs of phosphorescence lay at intervals all down her track, marking the effort of that giant hull, moving so smoothly yet so vigorously channelward; describing in circular patches the impact, the slapdash hurling aside of the life she bruised and left bleeding—the delicate organisms wrecked that she might pass.

Far to the south another greyhound steamed channelward carrying the mails to England.

She did not fly the same ensign, she had less speed, but Authority had started her some hours earlier . . . yet, the two were not racing. Captain Fitzgerald, standing there in the dark, acknowledged the situation with lips firm set.

Each night since they left New York he had stood there staring into the black pall which had accompanied them hither on their way; watching the changing hues hovering fitfully above the light-screens; staring at an horizon which always receded—illusive, visionary, challenging capture.

Each night the throb of the engines and the hum of the gale in pursuit had filled his ears. Each night for sixteen hours he had moved to and fro on that narrow platform, sixty feet poised in space; had noted the changing watches, the orderly procession of those who made reports, the broad and fiery pathway drawn by their passage. Each night he had noted how, when the second engineer was on duty, the machines moved with more snap; how the man in the crow's nest always appeared to stretch at the approach of dawn—as though the kindling skies affected him, standing there in his bag, so far from home, as it affects the

birds; how the third officer marched the bridge with the swing of the Army. And nothing had ruffled him.

But now, the information contained in those words sent by a junior officer at work with the sounding machine refused to lie still. "Eighty-two fathoms—grey sand and shell . . . grey sand and shell."

Captain Fitzgerald stared into the black seascape.

All his life this man had been an analyst, accustomed to sift evidence, to read character, judge events and pronounce upon them swiftly. For thirty years he had been one of the lords of the sea, giving orders without hesitation, using his authority with the precision that had gained him command of this greyhound of England, this scout for war-time, this swift and incomparable cruiser of the Naval Reserve.

He had the eye of a hawk, the instinct of the dumb brutes, and the knowledge of a man who is well read. During his long apprenticeship, Captain Fitzgerald had learned the value of giving instructions promptly; of choosing officers in whom he could trust, and of heeding that axiom of all strong men of the sea, "At

all hazards keep off the rocks." Yet, here was a message sent by one of those officers on whom he relied, carrying in the burden of it a warning: "Grey sand and shell," a factor upon which he should act, and could not. It was a phase he did not comprehend. Something must be done. He questioned what—he who was in command.

Some inward prompting had fallen upon this man, telling him that he was becoming nervous, fidgety, suggesting that he saw shadows where none existed; vessels under sail crossing his track, rocks which were not; that he was tired, stale, getting old.

A man on the right side of sixty, who had lived abstemiously, avoided gaiety, and breathed pure air, stale! He drummed on one arm with his night-glasses, examining for symptoms of sleep. No, he was not sleepy, but he was anxious. Below deck were two thousand people sleeping, careless of danger, pinning their trust in his sagacity. He was up there in command to see their trust was not misplaced. He put it to himself as he stood there staring into shadows which moved, listening to the throb and roll of machinery, to the hustle and jar of

seas that charged: "When there is the whole of God's ocean on the one hand and the rocks on the other, why juggle with the rocks?" Yet was he unable to fix on the order that was becoming imperative.

The Irish lights should have been in sight. Grey sand and shell admonished him of this. The log, the patent indicator clicking out revolutions in the engine-room, all pointed to the ship's position. Apparently the atmosphere was clear, yet fronting them was the blackness of a cave. A gale moved booming over them from the sou'-west, but there was no fog, nor any hint of it, only the lights remained hidden. In spite of this warning Captain Fitzgerald could not bring himself to act.

His keen mind acknowledged the facts, but registered it as a phase. It was a suggestion pointing definitely to the ground on which he stood; but for the moment this subtlety escaped him.

They were crossing to England with the mails. Further south another greyhound was furrowing through the dark, carrying also a mail to England. The two were not racing.

That thing is anathema to Authority, and Authority had condemned it in a Minute printed and circulated for the direction of commanders. They were not racing, therefore, but each was doing, as America phrases it, "his level best to get there." That must be considered. It was the creed in which a commander is trained. He must get there.

Fitzgerald argued the matter mentally.

The depth of water told him he was within the hundred fathom line; the detailed statement of sand and shell, approximately where; but whether he was to the north of his objective, or to the south was mere guesswork. Yet he hesitated.

The knowledge that there had come to him this rank thing, indecision, annoyed. He decided to stop, but had not given the order when across his mind came a vision of that other greyhound far to the south, steaming in seas unhampered as yet by rocks and lights which refused to be seen—a greyhound intent on "getting there," and filching the blue ribbon of the Atlantic. He decided to "haul out," as the phrase goes, and again came the remembrance of that slim craft stealing a march upon

him. The order remained ungiven. He stood on, telling himself he knew his way blindfold; that if he did not, then certainly the ship knew it—the ship that trembled beneath him, hissing through space, fiery all down her throbbing sides, the sentient thing he lorded.

The notion thrilled him. He decided to proceed—for, he argued, battling with indecision, was it not certain that given similar conditions, the greyhound down south would proceed?

Unknown, this thing was influencing him. Against his instinct this subterfuge baffled him. He objected to this attempt to take down his record. He knew there was risk; but, he decided, prodding with one hand at the rail, in all endeavour there is risk. That is a law.

The fancy stirred in a mind unaccustomed to fear. Unseen a force was at work demanding that he should put aside this chimera of possible danger, and win for England the battle of the mails. English shipowners were handicapped. English sailors were less competent than they were. The papers drummed it out. Statistics were hurled to prove it.

England was decadent, her manhood on a glissade. It was necessary, therefore, to show to all opposition nations a strong front, a resolute will; to win without turning a hair, and, without racing.

If he relied on his perspicacity, on his records, and refused to heed the clamour evolved by those words, "eighty-two fathoms, grey sand and fine shell," he would be the first to arrive. That was a result decided by his speed, and the papers would hum with his praise—his. Personally, it was he who would win.

Praise, blame! Win, lose! Dare, shrink . . . the personal equation loomed bold in the forefront, admonishing him, warning him, cajoling him, holding a sword or a crown on high for him to choose. It was the writing on the wall, and he faced it. Life or death. Life or death. But not for him alone . . . and against it the personal equation!

Ah! that surely was a new factor. From what forgotten cell, from which unused nerve had it sprung? Life or death, the personal equation. Fitzgerald stared into the murk; twisted on his heel; snapped out—

"Hard a-port! Stand by, below!" Then,

as the ship came swinging into the rut of seas, "Stop!"

The thing was done. He faced disgrace, mockery . . . perhaps even sympathy. He would lose. But he had given the order for which he had battled, and the giant ship responded with little tremors, flicks and quiverings in the new-born silence. She looked scornfully at the rollers moving out of space, and settled down to drowse before the release of propellers set eternally to drive.

And out of the shadows there came once more the quartermaster, carrying a piece of armour in his hand. He moved quickly to the commander's side. "Fifty-seven fathoms, sir," he said. "Gravel."

Captain Fitzgerald acknowledged the message with firm lips, and when the man had departed, lifted his cap and stood bareheaded under the clouds.

At that moment the personal equation seemed a factor too remote and humiliating for remembrance.

TORPEDOED

A STILL night, glum, soundless, but for the lap of seas still turbulent and vengeful from the late gale. The sky obscure, packed with clouds which had no movement ; dense, heavy, full of presage. No moon, no stars ; everything covered as with a lid, and the thud of a liner pushing for the east, a track of foam beads in her wake.

She came from England by a less direct route than had been her custom in pre-war days ; but now the Mediterranean put bonds on her and she stole swiftly down the Maltese Channel heading for Port Said. She did not steer straight, but followed a zigzag course which added to her burden of days, for the sea is not wide here and submarines infested it.

For that matter she had run the gauntlet of this menace from the Irish Sea, had sighted a periscope in the Bay and fallen foul of another before Cape Bon was passed. It was

part of her business to fight for her life without guns. The enemies she might encounter would be armed ; but the Merchant Service to which she belonged, fights with its head and with the ship's. She was called the *Calliope*, which is the muse of eloquence ; but she was not eloquent. She was dumb as were those who sailed her. Only her owner indulged in eloquence and he could afford it. Last voyage the *Calliope* had poured sixty thousand pounds into his lap and now she was off, submarine dodging, to double it.

For various doles the crew had accepted these conditions, submarine peril included. They called it war risk, which sounds well on paper, and in the captain's case added half-a-crown daily to his pay. And now they were engaged zigzagging down the eastern end of the Maltese Channel. They were zigzagging because suddenly out there, where it was too dark to see, a cry had flustered the officer in charge. Twice he heard it. Then he sent for his commander, who was lying down after ten days' duty.

He came up with the alacrity of one who is disciplined.

"A cry," he commented. "Where away?"

"Starboard bow, sir."

The captain took up his night-glasses and stared. "I don't see anything," he said. "Do you?"

"No, sir—not yet."

"You are sure it was a cry, I suppose?"

"Not a doubt, sir. It was plain enough the second time. I heard it as plainly as I hear you."

"Hum!" said the captain. "I'm inclined to remember the decoy theory."

He marched to the wing of the bridge and stood there staring into the darkness. The ship continued her zigzag course. He recognized that the still solitudes were alive with more peril than before—that is all. A perfect opportunity for those lurking sea-devils was in being, and he was tensely aware of it; aware that life was in the balance. He questioned what he must do if the cry were repeated. Should he stop or obey orders? Behind a cry there would be men . . . perhaps women, and if that were so, would it be possible to pass on? He knew the answer. He knew that at all hazards he would turn away to the south and search . . . perhaps continue searching for

hours. If the *Calliope* had carried a gun, he would have had no qualms, nothing to worry him. It would have been a fight of course; but in war one fights of necessity, whether one stands behind armoured plating or a sardine tin. Meanwhile the cry, if it were a cry, had not been repeated. He began to question the officer's report. If one wanted help one would shout and shout as long as strength remained. True—but what if strength were failing? A wave of hot air from the fiddley passed over the bridge and the captain swerved like one struck. He recognized that he required rest. It had been a long spell . . . and, meanwhile, he had not yet heard the cry.

He crossed to consult with the officer and suddenly stood still. The voice rang out, long drawn, faint. It was given by a man, perhaps by several shouting in unison. He came close to the officer—

"Is that what you mean?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"In all likelihood it's a decoy," he insisted. "You know these devils as well as I do. You know they will stick at nothing to get us—and, you know the orders."

"I do, sir—but——"

"There is no but. Don't mistake me, Chief. You are married and so am I; but somehow I don't fancy your wife would care to know you turned tail on drowning men any better than mine would. Port!" he swung round defiant. "Bring her south half a dozen points—we will take our chance."

Again the cry rang out. It was faint, faint, the shout of those at the end of their tether, people these men could not see, whose whereabouts was the merest guesswork. It was also, as they knew, one of the tricks practised by Fritz and his cousins, to lure ships to the slaughter chamber.

If ever men needed eloquence these of the *Calliope* needed it . . . if debate and the processes of committees be essential methods of governance. Yet, having given orders in tones which suggested annoyance, the captain and his companion stood silent under the grey dome. They saw their orders carried out, boats' crews in readiness, belts strapped on, lifebuoys free to float away if the unspeakable happened. The *Calliope* moved without lights, her scuttles screened, skylights rigorously covered. It was

not considered wise to carry lights at sea now that Germany had declared her intention of freeing it. Ships made no difficulty here. They were accustomed to do what landsmen found essential only after long argument, printed columns of appeal, and many raids. They passed through danger zones unlighted.

"See anything?"

Again it was the captain who spoke.

"Not a sign, sir."

"Nor can I. How did you make the sound bear?"

"Five points out. As nearly dead ahead now as I can guess."

"So I thought. Jove! I would give something to signal; but I daren't."

The chief made no comment. He was scarcely impressed by the decoy theory, although he was aware such cases had been known. The U-boats would be on the surface a night like this, and on the surface probably could walk round the old *Calliope*, blow her sky-high and look around for more. The chief had heard the cry, you understand, often enough to judge its meaning: his captain had but just come up and the voice had sounded weak since, weak.

The chief stared over the bridge-screen using his glasses, and sometimes with his hands concentrating on a small sector of the horizon without aid. The sea slapped the ship's side as they headed it more, otherwise no sound was noticeable. If wind existed it was following them round the compass. Clinkers from the funnel fell on the bridge and crunched under foot. The rail was wet, the gratings wet, the chief's clothes wet and clammy to the touch. It was as though a sea were running and they were plunging through it. But it was not the sea, it was dew which made them wet; and that, too, is a portent in the Mediterranean. The chief moved over to meet his commander.

"We should be there or thereabouts now, sir," he said. "It is ten minutes since we altered the course . . . and that should give us two-and-a-half miles at this speed."

"I agree. Prepare to lower Number Four. Send down to the electrician to get ready to put on the searchlight forward. Helm hard-a-port. Quartermaster, go to the look-outs and tell them to keep their eyes skinned all round."

The chief gave orders and returned. There was no shouting, no bo'sun's whistle, no bugle

—word was passed and the men took up their positions in silence.

"Helm's hard-a-port, sir!" announced the man at the wheel.

"Good. Keep it so."

They steamed in a circle, small at first, but larger after a while, and suddenly the cry came out broad on the port beam. They had overshot the distance; but now they closed and the searchlight blinked the attention signal for those who could read it.

Again came the cry, perhaps in response, and they caught its direction, took its bearing and steadied the helm at "right ahead."

"Now," said the captain, "we are in for it, U-boat or no U-boat." He leaned over a tube and spoke into the engine-room: "We shall be stopping directly, perhaps for some time. Keep her in hand to whack her up if necessary." He heard the answer and chuckled grimly at the tube, "Right—we'll tell you!"

The searchlight of a merchant ship is not powerful. It is intended for use mainly in the Canal, and for picking up buoys when coming into harbour at night; but it sufficed. It wavered a trifle at first, then threw a fair

beam, and at its second sweep drew a picture in white which was definite.

"That's no decoy . . . it's the real ma'kye, Chief," came from the captain's lips. "Half-speed, there . . . Stop!"

The telegraph clanged brazenly. It seemed there was need for silence no longer. Men strained their eyes searching that white picture.

"There's a bunch of 'em there!" came from the fore-deck with emphasis.

"Women too, if I can see straight," said another.

"Gawd, look sideways on the pirates!" quoth a third, diagnosing the cause out of hand.

Then an order from the chief: "Number Four to the water-level and stand by! Prepare Number Two!"

The *Calliope* pushed slowly nearer and came to a halt. At a signal from the bridge Number Four dropped bodily into the sea, and started away with a fine flourish. "Let her have it!" came from the officer who steered.

The men responded with a will.

There were days, not far distant, when it would have been impossible to lower that boat

and get her away from the ship much under half-an-hour; but that was all past and done with. War had produced the change. War, which had galvanized the nation as no other danger could, as no talk or propaganda or the stirring of authority by scaremonger writers or preachers could, as only the necessity to fight can or will. It had become a case of "You or me, my friend—you or me—and if I know anything it will be me." So they rowed away in their cockle-shell, banging the lumpy sea, spilling water, intent on getting there and en- entirely ignoring all questions of decoy, or those brazen specimens of frightfulness which were intended to burke our zeal.

Meanwhile the *Calliope*, forgetful of share- holders, steamed in a circle drawing ever nearer her children. They bashed at the sea, making a white track. They plunged, and a cascade, phosphorescent and amazing showered them. There came the voice of their officer. Some one appeared to have caught a crab or broken an oar. The *Calliope* lurched, solemnly con- sidering this factor. She sidled in a long roll and climbed back without effort. There had been a day when she, too, had lost means of

control. But that had happened in the China Sea, when a thing called a typhoon roared over her and she was sick, sick and very weary of battle. Then her children had banged with hammers, heated iron and steel, flogged, twisted, turned and made an immense noise deep in her entrails, and they had cured her. So, too, would those in the boat cure the ill which had come to them.

She watched. The boat moved on. Again a cloud of phosphorescence whelmed her, and the voices of those on deck gave vent to their approval.

Anon the frail craft returned, and the *Calliope* lay at the mercy of any U-boat that happened to be near. No one made light of the danger she faced. Look-out men stood as always searching for the pin-head which is the sign of it. One waited at the telegraphs ready to pass orders which would stir her, but the process of embarkation went on.

Five men, three women, and one child. That was the tale of those drawn from the edge of the pit. Others had existed on the raft; but now Valhalla held them as it holds

those who have fallen elsewhere. Cold, hunger, thirst, had contributed, each its part, to their end. They were dead, and some smiled as they lay staring at the Force which had conquered them. The sea was littered with them, with upturned boats, hen-coops, oars, buckets —all bobbing under the grey dome.

But five men, three women, and one girl-child survived—nine who bore no relation one to the other. The child's mother had existed on that raft, but stupor and the sea had called her. The women had each of them left a a husband on the ship; two had lost children, which the sea had taken. Of the five who were men, one was the sailor in charge of the raft, three others had clambered on board while hell yet yawned over them, and one sat jibbering, drinking from the sea, and tying knots in a handkerchief for remembrance.

For this ship which had gone, unwarned, in a crash of red flame, instant and annihilating, had carried neither gun for defence nor war stores, nor foodstuffs. She was a mailship from the east, and on her decks when she left Port Said were few very short of four hundred people. With the exception of the crew, who

are legitimate game in these days for those who would free the seas, were folk returning from the east after a life spent in the service of the Empire; other who were, as we say, globe-trotters; others who were business men, children, ayahs, Chinese servants, and some officials of the Indian Government.

The ship's name was known to the peoples of two hemispheres; her occupation plainly stated, her port of departure and destination no secret. In her splendid sphere she was as well known as the *Lusitania* in hers—and she had vanished in the same appalling way. An instant of blood-red massacre, an instant of noise and agony, an instant presently acknowledged by the German people with wild shouts of delight, the ringing of bells, and by the rest of the world with amazement bordering on incredulity.

So it stood in the first ghastly days, then slowly the world came to understand that the nation who had done this thing was mad. They saw a nation berserk and gloating over infamies too terrible for recapitulation, infamies too trivial, too childish to count for one grain's weight in the scales of war. And they saw

England gathering in those who were saved, sounding the Last Post over the dim solitudes which hold those who have passed—silent, calm, at one with the immense cohort of Empire, turning again to the task which is hers.

The captain from his place on the bridge as light streamed in at the east, looked down upon the evidences of that crime, and gave vent to the prevailing desire.

"God help the U-boat I come across this side of Kingdom Come, for no one else will." He turned to officers standing at hand: "Starboard to your course. Full speed ahead!"

And the dawn climbing high as they moved, threw a blood-red glow upon the screen of clouds out there where the mailship had disappeared.

THE *NELSON'S* ANCHOR

"THAT," said the skipper, jerking his thumb skyward, "is a seaplane, an' don't you forget it. Starb'd a bit. Bring her in a point an' steady her. A seaplane, mister, an' I don't care if I never see another. They are no use for anything bar throwin' bombs an' such like. I wouldn't be seen dead in an aeroplane of any sort, not if you'd give me the worth of her," he indicated the steamer by his hand; "not even if you were to throw in the value of the freights I've carried for Grimshaw, Peck'am & Co. this twelve months past—that's me."

He slapped the rail, looking very fierce. The *Nelson*, homeward on this trip from Brixham to the Thames, throbbed on her course unheeding. She made a big bow wave. Harry, to whom the skipper spoke, said "She pushed one half of the Channel in front of her, and left the other half behind in the shape of a

counter-wave." But of course he exaggerated. Mates are of no use unless they can exaggerate, as any log-book will testify. It is called "spinning yarns," which is, in its way, some sort of frigid inexactitude, hitherto masquerading as truth.

Now, the mate was on the bridge because McFuz, who was chief engineer, had impressed upon him the increasing value of aeronautics, and, being younger than Captain Bin, he had a natural leaning towards the new science.

He would have argued with the skipper had he been sure of his position; but, as this was his first trip in the *Nelson*, and her owners were uncertain of him, he held his gas, as he expressed it.

Having struck the *Nelson's* bridge rail without result, and slammed erroneous data at the head of his subordinate without opposition, Captain Bin marched two turns up and down in complete and exasperating triumph.

It was as though he crowed.

The mate recognized this, and in a deferential voice said: "It must be smooth sailing anyhow, sir. No seas to butt you into the middle of next week up there . . . nothing but air."

The skipper halted, withdrawing the short pipe he smoked.

"Air!" he puffed out. "Air smooth! Who in Moses ever heard the like? Why, it runs in lumps same as the sea does. I'd like to see you up in that chap with a breeze. I'd like to squint at you holding on like grim death to a mop-stick in your air. . . . I'd like to see you when you got down out of your air and staggered about blue with it, —— blue with it. I'd bet my last dollar you wouldn't call it air; you'd call it—— 'Allo! what's he up to now?"

They both turned to see.

The seaplane came down on a long volplane and swerved round the bows of a large steamer which headed up Channel about two miles to the eastward. Half an hour ago she had passed the little coaster with her nose in the air, as Captain Bin announced wrathfully. Homeward from Spain with copper ore for England's enemy as like as not, viâ some neutral port, so he put it, judging with the acumen of a trained observer.

The Channel was spread like a mirror after a series of gales and wetness which for months had added to its dangers. A few smoke-clouds

were visible, but not the vessels which produced them. Far away on the French coast the sails of a ship gleamed white in the sunshine. A sparkling day, too fine to last in Captain Bin's opinion, suggesting more rain or mist or westerly winds. To the east of the sailing ship four blobs of smoke indicated the presence of destroyers steaming to safeguard the transports carrying our light-hearted Tommies to the Front. A day so quiet and peaceful, so English, so resonant of the Spring which came, that the swift swoop of the seaplane appeared out of place, antagonistic.

Like a great bird she came down and slowed beside the rusty coaster. Her floats touched the pitted sea with the tinkle of a wherry moored in a tideway. Again she moved ahead, passed twice round the steamer, then rose, throwing a streak of foam for the sun to touch with silver. Up, up, up, circling as she rose, then still, motionless as a bird, a cormorant hovering against the blue.

"Well," said the skipper, "I allow that beats all."

"Fine, I call it," the mate joined in. "I could stay on deck all day watching her."

"An' nap behind the dodger at night-time to make up for it," snapped his lord. "Oh! I know you young fellers—was young myself once—an' I've got nothing against bein' young, except—well, there, that's me. 'Allo!"

The tramp they followed suddenly sheered broad off and seemed to be making a bee-line for Grisnez.

"What in smoked tea is she up to now?" asked Captain Bin.

"Seen something, I expect—mines perhaps," the mate ventured.

"Not it. You feel mines—don't see 'em, my son. Feel 'em, if I know anything, for one nicking second, an' then you feel nothin' more till Kingdom Come. That's mines. I go near 'em, drag for 'em, try to sink 'em? Not if you paid me. I hate war! My wife says war's murder," said Captain Bin. "'Allo!"

A column of water shot high into the sunlight, and a moment later a growling roar came down to scare them. Captain Bin stood quite still, straggle-legged, staring through his binoculars. He dropped his pipe, omitted to pick it up, and sprang to the telegraph. He

rang it fiercely for full speed ahead. Back and fore he pushed the handle, each time leaving it at full speed. He turned to the open skylight which bounded the after-bridge rail, and roared into cavernous space: "Let her have it, McFuz. Give her smoke if it's the last trump! Kim up, McFuz!"

He looked to see the old *Nelson* jump; but she did not jump, she moved in her placid fashion, pushing the Channel before her, undisturbed. Then he came back to the bridge wing and elbowed the mate aside.

"Where is she now?" he growled, searching for her and finding her with his glasses. "Starb'd! Round with your hel-lum—starb'd till you have her dead on end. Lord love us! She's goin'. The nasty, sneakin', lyin', upendin' German sausage! You would, would you? Lord give me patience!" He turned to the mate. "Down you go, mister. Get your boat ready. Get all hands up. Tell 'em to smirk. An' stand by till I give you the word."

The mate vanished like one blown from his station. A vast bustle ensued: shouts, the clang of ropes flung down, the tramp of several

pairs of very heavy boots, a rain of oars, rowlocks, and the boat hung ready at the water level.

The *Nelson* pushed onward with praiseworthy weight. She could have done better if that front half of the Channel had kept to the sea-level. McFuz, at the throttle, could have done more with her in the way of "lettin' her oot," but as it was he was free to climb the fiddley trap and glance around. He stared at the still horizon.

"What's agley?" he asked, pipe in mouth.

"Mines," said Captain Bin.

"Whaur?"

"Dead ahead."

"Hoo d'ye ken it's mines?" quoth the engineer.

"Five minutes ago," said his captain with impressive intonation, "there was a cock-a-hoop cargo-boat paddlin' yonder—two miles distant at most. Now she's gone. See that scatterin' of black dots?"

"I do," said the engineer.

"That's what is left of her. A scrap-heap," Captain Bin announced.

"Eh, mon!" ejaculated the engineer.

"Just so, McFuz. Nothin' more, nothin' less; and I'm goin' in to see what's left to pick up!"

The engineer viewed him with large appreciation. "Gude for ye," he said. "But I thought ye aye refused tae tamper wi' mines an' minefields?"

Captain Bin turned smartly on his critic. "Who told you that?" he demanded.

"Yoourself," said McFuz.

The skipper took two turns up and down his small bridge, then halted by the fiddley—

"Sandy," he said in a complaining voice, "you are like all Scotchmen, you have no more humour than—a sausage."

"I wasna aware," McFuz blinked back, "oor skeeper looked on submarines as points o' humour. But I'm lairnin' . . . ou, aye, I'm lairnin'."

Captain Bin stared. The engineer descended slowly to the black depths whence he had emerged. He stood a moment with head and shoulders just clear of the bars, and jerked his thumb seaward. "See yon?" he ejaculated, and vanished.

Then Captain Bin discovered, within half a

mile of the scrap-heap they approached, the periscope of U05 dabbling lazily at the swell. His lips came in line at this. A stern crease showed between his eyes. He stared over the screen at the hill they pushed before them, saw where it sucked hollow abreast the bridge, the rolling counter-wave that climbed astern. No use pretending that a puncher of the *Nelson's* breed could approach unseen. The noise she made was like the swish and drone of a threshing-machine on a still day in the fields. Nevertheless, he would have a go for it.

"Starb'd!" he said, but so quietly it seemed he fancied the periscope could hear as well as see.

The old *Nelson* punched round, pointing to strike that sneaking, deadly sink-me-quick. She came slowly until she was end on; then Captain Bin whispered as before—

"Steady! Keep her there. See that wee stickin'-up thing? Well, I'm goin' to razee it off of him . . . if he'll let me."

So, he was in for it. No use squirming, pretending he could not see. No use sticking to formulas and peace precepts. There were things in that scrap-heap which showed signs

of life and made him angry—arms, legs, spluttering foam. The mate must attend to that. He approached the rail after slowing the engines.

"Let go! See what you can find," he ordered, and returned to jam the telegraph again at full speed, and to watch that "transmogrified telescope," as he called it.

"Thinks I can't see him," he mused, staring. "Right-o! Thinks I'm jolly well blind." He smoked hard. The periscope disappeared. In a little circle of foam it passed from the seas, just as Captain Bin was bracing himself for the shock. Lord love us! The beast was gone. It was the work of an instant. But it was gone. Nothing for the *Nelson* to punch; nothing to grind and smash with her blunt, bluff bow but the Channel. And now it would be necessary to stop right in the path of the thing, to give him a chance—the chance for which he waited —perhaps.

Captain Bin felt a cold trickle run down his back. He smoked hard to drive it away. It was a new experience. He was not of a thrilling type; solid, rather, like the *Nelson* and Mrs. Bin. Where, by the way, were

Mrs. Bin and the children Bin? He wondered if they knew just where their father was—stuck at point-blank range, staring into the eye of a thing that could blow him into the middle of next week in less time than it takes to say "Je-rusalem." Playin' the giddy goat, that's what he was doin'; acting as he had sworn to Mrs. Bin he would never act. Well, anyhow unless he sailed over that scrap-heap he would have to stop. That was a moral. He advanced to the telegraph and set it amidships.

"Stop," said he, "and be hung to you."

If the old *Nelson* had been fast, Captain Bin would have had that periscope, Mrs. Bin or no Mrs. Bin; but that was impossible now. He realized that the *Nelson* would be unable to scotch a submarine in a month of Sundays —under steam. So he stopped, just as the *Hogue* and *Cressy* stopped to pick up those who were drowning from the *Aboukir;* stopped, as was his duty, to save life. The cold trickle which had troubled Captain Bin passed away. He glowed with pride.

His engineer climbed from the depths, and stood again to survey the scene. High overhead sounded the drone of the seaplane, and

on looking up they discovered the beautiful machine drawing near. The engineer was the first to put the new aspect in focus—

"Now for it, Cap'. It's ten to five on the bird."

"What bird?" asked Captain Bin.

"Yon."

"The skipper glanced up.

"She can't fight submarines," he objected.

"Aiblins submarines canna fecht her," the engineer corrected. "Ah'm waitin' tae see whaur he's gone . . . whether he wull bark or stay sinkit."

This was quite beyond Captain Bin, and he said so.

"Talk English," he advised, "if you want to talk; else leave it to them that can. I'm goin' to move the engines."

McFuz retired, firing a final shot as his head disappeared.

"Look oot for the tin fish he wull send ye." He vanished, chuckling broadly. The submarine had dived.

The skipper squared his shoulders. His teeth were set. He felt it would be good to bite—if he only knew how. The pacifist

theories of the Reverend Mr. Thomas, his wife's instructor in these matters, failed altogether at this crisis. A ship had been blown up right under his nose. Some of her chaps, no doubt, had already solved the great mystery. Others were shivering in the boat Harry was laboriously urging towards the old *Nelson*. There seemed to be quite a crowd. Lucky it was calm, decided Captain Bin ; otherwise how many would reach in that cockle-shell ? No, he could not offer his cheek in a case like this : but he ached to offer his boot.

He manœuvred his engines so as to bring his ship round, and halted her with a seaman-like sweep, so that the mate had little to do but fall alongside. Then came the deluge. Twenty-five men climbed on board, and lined the rail, shivering, to hoist a consignment of those who had been injured. Captain Bin straddled beside them issuing orders. He had forgotten the ship's peril : the fact that a submarine lay somewhere, waiting to strike. He had forgotten the seaplane whizzing high in their wake. He was busy prescribing the stokehold for drenched mariners, pants for the undressed. In his new rôle as belligerent,

he had time to consider merely his men, as he called them, and to get them stowed.

He learned from one who stood in a wet singlet and drawers that there were others missing, and instantly set his boat cruising about amidst the litter which still appeared. He had forgotten everything but the fact that he was there to pick up sailors attacked without warning by a pirate manned by persons who were known as Sausages. He was busy and immensely important. At that moment the possibility of seeing his name in the papers, with perhaps a photograph of himself, his wife, and kids, all standing grouped about him, had begun to take shape.

Then the seaplane came towards him on a long, dropping swoop, and touched water with its floats just abaft the bridge.

"Picked them all up?" demanded the pilot, a person in goggles and a leather tunic.

"Nigh on forty of 'em, sir," said Captain Bin.

"Good! Any more about?"

"Can't see any."

"Right! Then get a move on. Don't lie waiting to be pilled. Follow me in to the

land. We can get him, if you care to co-operate."

The skipper demurred.

"I've got my owner's instructions to obey, sir," he explained. "Nice I should look if I lost the *Nelson*, after picking up all those poor chaps. Anyhow," he braced himself for contingencies, "what is it you want me to do?"

The seaplane moved easily beside this coaster, her propeller revolving sufficiently to enable her to keep pace—a wonderful, shining, shimmering creation that held Bin spellbound.

"It's a lucky thing for you, my friend," the pilot informed him in the silence of shut-off engines, "that I happened to be in the neighbourhood when that devil struck. How long do you think you would have been afloat after you had picked up the men if I had not been here?"

Captain Bin expressed his absolute ignorance. He said—

"I am a quiet man. I know nothin' at all about fighting. I've been drilled to believe fighting's wrong; but I'm beginning to have my doubts. Still, it seems to me I can't do

much. Why, I haven't got so much as a pea-shooter on board! Couldn't hit a haystack if I had, let alone a submarine: I'm that rusty."

"Exactly. That is why I came alongside," said the pilot. "Now, look here, Captain, you listen to me," again for a moment the engines roared as the seaplane drew ahead, then in the silence, "I believe there's a pretty big reward offered to the merchant ship that sinks a submarine. Very well. If you don't funk it, I can help you to score. I think I can show you all you want to know—that is, I take it, to hit that devil which has just torpedoed one ship, and would torpedo you if he didn't know it's my day, not his, and that he must lie close.

"Come, what do you say? My name is Mathieson. I'm Flight-Commander G. S. Mathieson, R.N., and this gentleman behind is Lieutenant Harold, R.N., who can shoot more than a bit. If there is any trouble with your owner, the Admiralty will stand by you. What do you say?"

Captain Bin expanded his chest.

"Say, sir? Why, I'm on, if you think

I can do anything with a slow old tub like this."

"Good *Nelson*!" cried the pilot. "I thought I could see fire somewhere. You have an anchor, I suppose—perhaps two?"

"Well, sir, what d'you think?" asked Captain Bin. "I'm not in my missus's parlour."

The two seated so lightly at their ease in the skimming seaplane laughed broadly, and the commander said—

"What do they weigh?"

"My anchors, sir?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps a ton and a half between the two."

"Good," said Mathieson. "I guess that will hold us. Now, follow me. Don't hesitate; just follow, and I will tell you what to do. Anyone there who can signal — Morse code, whistle or flags?"

"You leave that to me, sir, and to my mate, Harry Nairn."

"Good! Then I lead. When I am too distant for sound signalling, I shall use flags; otherwise a horn. Good luck."

Then, before Bin quite recognized what was

happening, he was in for it. The waterplane began to buzz in earnest, to dip like a bird just starting from the sea, to skim, rising, rising, with a most wonderful facility and ease, until she seemed to be moving at the rate of an express train towards Dungeness.

Captain Bin slammed the telegraph over to full speed ahead, brought his ship round and followed patiently. He sighed as he glanced at the distant machine.

"What d'you think of that, Harry?" he asked, with the air of one responsible for the whole operation. "Something like, ain't it?"

"Wish I was one of 'em," said the mate. "I believe I could fly, if I had the chance."

"Stick to your job here, my son," the skipper advised. "You will find it pay better than flyin'."

He glanced around, and seeing McFuz solemnly watching the seaplane, became provocative.

"Nothin' better to do than star-gazin'?" he asked.

McFuz held him with his eye.

"That's what comes of star-gazin', Cap', an' don't you forget it. Engineer star-gazin',"

he hammered home, "not sailor-man star-gazin'. That's oor handiwark, man; not yoours. Not in fifty thoosand years could sailor-men raise the like o' that—not in a million. Look at this!" He snapped at the *Nelson's* dim shape. "Ships, ye ca' 'em—yoour sort o' ships. F-s-s-s! We make 'em ta fly an' tae dive."

"An' when you've made 'em," said the skipper, "we sail 'em. Phut! Go below, Sandy, an' look after your job."

Mc Fuz retired blinking. He was aware that Captain Bin had scored; and that warlike personage shot his cuffs, such as they were, picked up his binoculars and said to the mate—

"Get out our waggers, blue ones; then blow the water off the whistle. Don't sound it, though—see?"

The *Nelson* solemnly pushed the northern section of the Channel before her, and did her best to get away from the southern wave which aimed at her taffrail. Over there, a speck in the blue already, the seaplane made direct for the high, bluff hills which touch the coast at Fairlight. Captain Bin got out

his chart and patted it smooth. He put weights on it to keep it from blowing away, and bent over refreshing his memory. There was Rye Bay, with Stephenson Shoal, just this side of Dungeness. Fairlight shoal on the left. It seemed from the course taken by the seaplane that she would lead right over the sand ridge which has Fairlight Shoal for its centre. "All very well," said Captain Bin, "for a flyin' machine; but won't do for me, not at any price."

They punched on, steadily drawing nearer. The seaplane swerved now, going first to the west, then north, then east. Captain Bin became warm. All very well, but if he was to do just what the seaplane did, good bye *Nelson*, good-bye Captain Bin, good-bye grub. It couldn't be done. He became emphatic as the coastline lifted and the sea shoaled. He was on the point of turning out again, when to his immense relief, the seaplane turned. He drew alongside, and signalled—

"He's not there. He's over in Rye Bay. Nice soft bottom—sandy; one of his special docks. I will go in and look. You follow slowly; but don't come in till I signal."

He dropped on the water alongside, switched off and said—

"You understand he will be lying doggo. He won't see us, but I shall see him. What water are you drawing?"

"Fifteen feet forward, eighteen feet aft, sir."

"Good. That will do. I won't put you ashore. Get your anchors ready, with plenty of run on them. When I give the word, let go port. Then stand by starboard. I will signal from overhead. If you do as I tell you, I think you will be handling a fatter cheque this time next week than I shall. Good luck!"

Again the seaplane skimmed off, rising and sailing straight for the new objective.

Rye Bay. Out there, then, within sight of the sand dunes, the golf-links and the winding, mud-laden Rother, was one of England's enemies. Lying on the bottom, if you please, ready to move when it was dark and the seaplane had vanished, and he had finished thinking. It appeared that they always thought things out on the bottom. A murderous business, Captain Bin decided, stumping to

and fro his small bridge ; the sort of thing you might expect of savages or Sausages.

He followed slowly until the sand-dunes of Rye were plainly in sight, and the *Nelson* began to acknowledge the influence of shoal water. Then he went slow, very slow, watching the seaplane, which now hovered not far above his stumped mastheads, circling to obtain a position.

"Wonder if she's spotted him?" he questioned of McFuz.

"I wud like tae be as sairtain o' my share in that fifty-pund note ye'll be haundlin'."

They both stood ricking their necks to watch. The seaplane buzzed like a giant bee, high overhead, sailing at varying altitudes, until suddenly the observer waved his flag. Captain Bin waved his.

"Stand by your port anchor, there," he ordered, translating for the mate's benefit, and Harry acknowledged that he understood.

"Let go!" signalled the seaplane.

"Let go!" roared Captain Bin.

The cable jingled, drowning all sound, and the little skipper shot out his cuffs. He stood wondering what in the world he had let go his anchor for, squared his hands on his hips, and

looked very wise. That was essential, in view of the presence of the helmsman. McFuz, too, had bugled loudly his nose from the fiddley trap.

"Go full speed astern!" signalled the seaplane.

Captain Bin slammed the telegraph over, and McFuz disappeared.

"Full!" reiterated the seaplane,

Captain Bin waved his flags. Something was happening. He could feel the runch of his cable.

"Full speed!" he roared, craning over the engine-room skylight. "Give her socks! Never mind your bed-plates. Back the eternal soul-case out of her, McFuz, an' say I told you."

The engines raced. The *Nelson* quivered like an express suddenly brought to a standstill by her brakes. Then came a fresh signal from the cormorant which hung over them all—

"Let go starboard anchor!"

"Let go!" Captain Bin accentuated. "Let go quick. Hold on to nothin'. Let her have it neat, windlass an' all. Dump the bloomin' fo'c's'le on her an' be hung to her. So!"

He drew himself up, aware that he was on the edge of profanity, mopped his brow and turned to find McFuz staring at the seaplane.

"Cruise in a circle at full speed!" said the flags, and, with a shock, Captain Bin gave the necessary order.

"Missed!" he announced to the bridge darkly. "Don't know what's happening—don't know nothing. Nice position for a British shipmaster. Just what he might have expected, taking orders from a thing like that!"

He glowered at the seaplane.

The cables ground in their hawse-pipes. The *Nelson* heeled, dumped, kicked, as though, in Captain Bin's phrase, "she'd gone off her blessed Nanny." McFuz was giving her socks with a vengeance. Then something snapped, and the old coaster staggered to an even keel.

"What's gone?" Bin shouted.

"Starboard anchor, sir—cable short off at the hawse."

Captain Bin was very angry.

"Swear," said McFuz, coming up. "'Twull do ye gude."

Then, as it happened, the seaplane intervened with a message of peace. She came sailing

down in a most wonderful spiral, and halted on her floats beside the worried coaster.

"Good *Nelson!*" said her pilot. "Cap'n, I congratulate you. She's done."

"Done?" the skipper gulped.

"Holed, sir. Your starboard anchor happened on a weak spot. I should say it's on her cabin table."

Captain Bin took off his cap.

"I'm that hot," he explained, "it might be June." Then he faced the pilot and said quietly, for the propeller no longer buzzed: "Do you mean to say I've finished him—done him in?"

The pilot pointed to a patch which was spreading on the water.

"See that?" he asked. "Well, that's oil. See those bubbles? Well, I need not tell you what that is; but, if you want my opinion, I should say that submarine will stay in dock till we pick her up, Captain; so you may as well put in a claim for your cheque."

"But I didn't see her, couldn't have touched her without your help, sir. Lord! but I can't take it that way. We'll go shares—if there is anything in it. I couldn't think of it else."

"That's all right, Captain. It's our job to wipe them out one way or another. I was helpless by myself—still, if you want to be generous, send Fifty Pounds to the Disabled Sailors' Fund, and call it quits."

"I will," said Captain Bin.

And as the *Nelson* steamed on her course that night, the skipper addressed the stars with—

"It's dead against my wife's principles, an' it's dead against all I've promised ; but, blow me, if I were twenty years younger, if I wouldn't enlist in *something*—even if it was air ! "

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CAPTAIN BIN

I

THE coaster known as the s.s. *Nelson*, wearing the Red Ensign of all the seas, pushed through the puddle we politely term the North Sea. Astern, faint against a lifting dawn was the Maas Lightship, curtseying in a ground-swell; ahead and on either hand an open expanse of water very much the colour of Flanders mud, sown with mines.

"A year ago," said Captain Bin with a side-long glance at the mate, "if any super-'eaded duffer had told me I'd be navigatin' the old *Nelson* through mine-fields to-day, I'd — I'd have knocked him silly."

The mate struggled with a smile and said: "Just so, sir . . . and I'd have liked to be there to back you up."

Captain Bin took this for what it was worth.

He had no great opinion of Henry Nairn's prowess as a fighter ; but he failed to comment on it. He was immersed in larger issues. "Six months ago," he asserted, staring round the dim horizon, "I was what they call a pacifist, an' my wife was an out an' outer of the same kidney. We had to be at our place o' worship. The Reverend Mr. Thomas saw to that. . . . I'd like to have 'im up here now, on the s.s. *Nelson's* bridge beside you an' me, mister, and watch which cheek he'd offer 'em if he got slapped.

"Cheek!" He enunciated, using his eyes busily as his tongue, "I doubt he'd be that flustered he wouldn't know where to put his hand on one—what?"

The mate guffawed suddenly, and the skipper paused with equal promptitude—

"An' you laugh!" he complained. "I don't see anythin' to laugh at. It's not funny that I know of. I can't see what it is makes you laugh so easy . . . this isn't a pantomime—an' I'm not a clown that I know of—what?"

"No, sir."

The mate as suddenly at attention found it

essential to add: "The fact is, sir, it just crossed me what he'd look like going up—coat-tails here, you know, brimmer there, gloves . . . oh! and that dicky of his——"

"Who says he wears a dicky?" asked Captain Bin.

"Well, sir, I know he wears flannel shirts—so he——"

"Doesn't follow at all . . . and how do you know . . . 'Ullo! What's that?"

A dull roar came to them on the breeze from the south. The *Nelson* purred as she plunged at the bow-wave she heaped, jarred amidships where it scooped away, jarred heavily aft where the counter-wave steadily pursued her.

"My word!" said the mate. "That's a big one."

"Big what?"

The mate swept the horizon with his glasses, lowered them and said—

"Explosion of some sort, sir."

Captain Bin marched two or three times up and down his small bridge, took a bearing of the Maas Lightship, laid it off on the chart and came again to the wing.

"Explosion, yes, that's so, he gave out. "Mines in collision perhaps. Submarines punching them perhaps. Crabs or jelly-fish skylarking around the detonators perhaps . . . but dangerous if you ask me—upliftin', as the Reverend Mr. Thomas calls it. . . . Um—perhaps."

He marched again. The *Nelson* shook through succeeding rollers, brushed foam out of them, plodding on her way to market, her eggs intact.

"I don't like it," said Captain Bin as he passed the broad back of his subordinate, "and I don't suppose you like it. It isn't in reason we should, seeing we can't hit back . . . but, if that chap they say cruises round about the Maas Light should stick his ugly *Unterseeboot* in my way I'll do my best to show him what I think of him. Dynamite, gun-cotton, shells are for the fightin' line—not for the bridge of a peaceable sailorman, eh! Lord, give me patience. If I get alongside him I shall hurt him. 'Pon my Jimmy I will."

He entered the wheelhouse, brought out a telescope and searched methodically the horizon, the sea, the coast line, every inch of it, with

the patience of a novice. Then he shut the glass, replaced it and came once more to stand straddle-legged beside the mate.

"Nothing," he remarked. "Not so much as a drifter—anywhere. Wonder what it was? Who it was? If Sandy McFuz was on watch he'd be up here to tell us. He'd tell us it was the logical outcome of star-gazin' . . . 'engineer-star-gazin',' you'll remember; not 'sailor-man star-gazin'.' Maybe," said Captain Bin with heavy irony, "he's right. Maybe he's wrong . . . but I call star-gazin' that blows peaceful sailor-men up into the presence of their Maker, like a freyed jigjag puzzle for the angels to sort and put together, murder; that's what I call it. Not star-gazin', mister."

And again the mate smiled broadly, taking care to lift his glasses so that the smile was hid, and holding his breath so that no sound escaped. Captain Bin seemed to resent this as he marched to and fro, hands deep in pockets. He eyed the fiddley trap. It is possible he resented the mate's stoicism under torture, and that the presence of Sandy McFuz, the engineer, whose Christian name was Archibald, would have been welcome.

But Sandy "prefaired his pew" in the early hours of dawn. He said it made him feel "releegious."

Again a heavy booming roar shook over the plodding coaster, jarring her bones, her cargo, her attenuated masts; and again Captain Bin halted to search for the elusive enemy ships known to sailors as U-boats.

The glum horizon rimmed them round unbroken; a leaden circle which accompanied them in their march towards home even as it had accompanied them on their march for the breakfast bacon and eggs of Amsterdam demanded so clamorously by an Island Nation. Captain Bin commented on the situation from a different standpoint. He said, "They're fighting over there on the coast Zeebrugge way . . . that's what it is; and if I get my eggs into the Thames without breaking any, I'll deserve a leather medal with a wooden string. And I'll get it too. That's the new tip, mister. Medals. Don't you forget that when you are up for master. 'What is it,' the examiner will ask you, 'a sailor looks for and never expects to see?' And you will answer—'Medals.'

"A little while back," he went on, with necessary point and emphasis, "we Merchant Service men weren't worth our salt. Nothing we did was right. Most things that happened meant the sack. Neither shipowners nor the Board of Trade cared two snaps of a muzzle-loader for us. There were thousands of us, and the bulk of us were fools . . . stupid, wooden-headed, grumblin', three-sheets in the wind, Nicodemus fools! If we could get into collision in any possible sort of way, we got into collision. If we could run full tilt on to icebergs, we ran full tilt on to them. If we could smash ships, drown passengers and play the giddy imbecile *anyhow*, we did it. They all agreed on that. It was the only question on which every soul was agreed . . . an' now we are heroes.

"'Stamp on 'em,' they shouted all together, like a flock of disturbed geese. 'Sit on 'em hard; they have no friends. We wouldn't trust a mother's son of them further than we could throw Buckingham Palace. They aren't sailors. They are 'longshoremen got out of Jacobs's books that can't navigate

better than they can carry fiz. . . . An' now, if you please, we get this sort of thing. . . .'"

Captain Bin pushed out his arms, showing cuffs decorated by the wavy insignia of a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve. He glanced sharply at his companion.

"That's one of the results of war," he added. "The first to my mind. It makes us feel we're not worms."

The mate stared through glasses at the pallid sea. He had heard these things on various stages before; but now, it appeared, he was in for a dress rehearsal. He knew that he was neither expected nor asked to supply comment; not even to quack in chorus. He knew that it is the province of subordinates to acquiesce simply and with enthusiasm when their commanders hold forth—even as elsewhere. But Harry Nairn was touched by the "worm" simile, and he showed it by lowering his glasses, meeting his skipper's eyes and saying apologetically: "Soon maybe though, sir."

He could not have said much less in speech, yet Captain Bin frowned, pursed his lips, and

for a space of minutes devoted his energies to marching from side to side, examining the horizon from every possible vantage. Then he came back, bubbling as before with suppressed pride—

"A little while ago," he said, "people at home thought no more about us than they thought of the Army. Then we and the Army were both on the same dead level of disgrace. That was altered just for a day or so while we pulled things out of the fire for 'em in South Africa; but after that it fell back again . . . same old stifling indifference, same old stupid jokes in the comics, same old bunkum about not serving men in uniforms at an hotel—just for all the world as though bein' in uniform made a man into a sort of Bashi-Bazouk, unfit for Cive to elbow. . . . Oh, an' the same old snubs an' cheese-parin' an' dying in the workhouse for chaps that had helped to stick old Krüger in his patch . . . and, I give you my word for it, I was no better than the rest till now. They pretty nearly made a Socialist of me," said Captain Bin, with tremendous confidence, "they made me squirm.

"Why, I couldn't go to my place in chapel but what they turned on the gas hot . . . 'the devil's livery,' they called it, and me brass-bound! 'Our God,' said one of them in my hearing, 'Who has bidden us love our enemies and suffer evil without complaint, has no mind that we should cross the sea to cut the throats of our brothers, because murderers in khaki an' puttees desire to test the new-fangled guns they've invented on men on ships!'

"Murderers, mister!" said Captain Bin, with increasing emphasis. "That's our Tommies . . . you, me, and every jack-snipe of us that sets up a front when he's pecked. Murderers, mind! Healthy doctrine I call it . . . I told Mrs. Bin so when I got out into the open, and we had words over it . . . but that was before I got these," again he shot out his stripes, "and put a matter of five hundred pounds to her credit in the bank. I thought I had converted her then. I thought I had got her for good and all away from the Pacifists. But what can a man do when he's home twelve hours once a fortnight or thereabouts, an' is dead sleepy

when he gets there? Why, nothing. 'Ullo! What's that out there?"

He clapped glasses to his eyes and stood like one carven on the *Nelson's* bridge, staring.

The mate searched also.

"Looks like a can buoy," said he, "or a chunk of timber."

"But isn't," said Captain Bin. "Starboard, hard. Let her have it. Call the hands out. Smart's the word."

The mate seized the whistle cord and gave one long blast, followed by three short—which meant in that ship, "All hands on deck. Boat Stations."

In her dull way the *Nelson* persisted to push through the yellow sloppiness which surrounded her on every hand, as though intentionally she refused to obey orders. Then with sullen quiescence began to pay off, to acknowledge her master, much as a sulky child obeys, lest greater trouble ensue.

And in the process she pushed so near that patch of cold grey, rising and falling with the swell, that Captain Bin ordered all hands to take cover in the alley-way, while he stood straggle-legged and expectant on guard.

Archibald McFuz, the engineer, climbed to his vantage place on the fiddley gratings and waved cheerily his greetings ; but Captain Bin was too much occupied to reply.

He was oppressed by the fact that the *Nelson* steered like an island drifting on the Amazon. He said she usually required ten days' notice of a change of course, and a week to carry it through. McFuz admitted she was slow. He explained her predilection for the *status quo* by saying there was a strike at Govan, where she was built, when her keel was laid, and that she acquired "pairmanent" rather than "sub-pairmanent" magnetism while she was waiting. To make things worse, it appeared that a further strike took place about the time she was ready for her boilers, consequently she had got the habit of waiting in her bones. He inferred from these factors that she would "gae canny all her days, and now, that if ever she touched a mine or came in contact wi' the blunt end of a torpedo, she would gae up sae geengerly that all hands would think she was a new kind o' flying' machine."

And he said now, as he sat on the edge of his fiddley-trap, gazing at Captain Bin, "that it

was proveedential she was a slow ship, an' canny," otherwise her "pereemeter" would have been increased to an extent that would have assured contact with the mine they both watched. "In point of fact, if ye ask my opinion, we should be at this moment gaein' skywards in laups an' boonds wi'oot breakfast."

But Captain Bin scarcely heard. He stood there with beads of sweat trickling from beneath his cap, watching "her swing," noting her wayward method, her sovereign calm in the presence of that dim thing which, in a moment, could hoist her, split and torn, in a tornado of red flame from her place on the waters. He saw the ship's moment of greatest peril, her dilatory curve; saw her draw away and plunge her nose in still safer regions and learned the lesson which an Island Nation has been overlong learning—that war is hell. That the only way to avoid war is to be ready to make war.

He turned to McFuz, blazing at the knowledge—

"How about the other cheek with things like that in your path, Sandy?"

"If," quoth the engineer, "ye want an answer tae that, Tom Bin, I'm of opeenion there would

be nae ither cheek tae offer. . . . Eigh, mon! but its weel for us they engineers made her slow."

"Slow or fast I'll show you something, Sandy McFuz, that a sailor can do wi' her." He turned to the helmsman. "Steady your wheel! Starboard! Bring her round!" He found a handkerchief and sponged his brow. "Slow! there mister. . . . Stop!"

The telegraph worked by Harry Nairn gave emphasis to his commands with the usual gong-clamour, and the *Nelson* obeyed in her ambling way, came round, halted and lay nudging the swell. Captain Bin in the interval had manœuvred so that the sun was behind him, the mine distinct, bobbing in the puddled sea. It looked ugly. A thing calculated to blow men into eternity in an instant of time. He could see the spiked projections, the detonating points of this adjunct of the Mailed Fist, and marched into the chart room his lips grimly set on the word. Once he had smiled indulgently at the mere suggestion of War Lords or Mailed Fists. He said Democracy was its own Lord, and inferred that Germany was so ruled; but now he found room to question these statements.

He came back to the bridge armed with a rifle and a case of cartridges, frowning, the antithesis of any known breed of Pacifist. He glanced sidelong at McFuz, as though that doughty soul had challenged him. "Now," said he, "I will show you what I can do. I've got the sun behind me and I wasn't in the Reserves for nothing, in spite of the Reverend Mister Thomas."

He took up his glasses and examined the still death lying so close to his elbow. McFuz thought he was temporizing and attempted to stir him.

"I'll gie ye three tae one ye canna hit her," said he.

Captain Bin turned upon him with the sorrow of one who refuses an opportunity—

"She's half our length distant, no more," he said. "I'm a poor man, Sandy, an' so are you . . . otherwise I would take your money."

He slipped a cartridge home, watched till the *Nelson* stooped, then fired.

Instantly there was a violent explosion. The ship trembled as though the thing had struck home. Water descended upon her from a vast column which towered for an instant high above

the stumpy masts—a white geyser-like pyramid which fell upon her and ran gobbling to leeward with a swiftness that amazed.

McFuz, wet to the skin and flattened to the bars of his grating, was the first to find breath—

"Losh!" he cried, "but you're a dandy shot, Tom Bin."

"I learned that," the skipper answered without pause, while you an' Govan were busy wi' rivets an' cold-chisels an' strikes . . . but a lucky shot! A shot I couldn't make twice—if you ask me. Starboard to your course! Full speed, mister!"

The *Nelson* slowly ambled in the direction ordered. Captain Bin marched watching her gravely. "She couldn't hasten if the devil was in her tracks," he decided as the water slowly percolated to his boots. He squelched as he walked. He stood still and glanced at the mate—

"Send a hand for the steward," he commanded, "I ooze. Tell him to bring me up a dry rig-out—pants, shirt, all the lot. Tell him to put 'em in the chart room with a cup of Oxo hot as the south-east corner of that I-talian's Inferno. Tell him to look slippy

with it, or—blest if that stinkin' Kaiser won't score a win!"

He turned and marched nearer McFuz, whose head appeared emerging again from his cage.

"For two pins!" he cried out, as McFuz faced him smiling broadly, "I'd chuck this dazzlin' job and take to fightin' straight. Call that war?"

"Engineer's war," said McFuz.

"I call it murder," Captain Bin asserted. "You might as well poison the grub."

"They do," said McFuz, "an' the wells—but they ca' it war."

"Then I'd hang all engineers," the skipper announced.

"Chemists," McFuz pleaded.

"An' chemists too," came to hearten him.

"Losh! but you'd want some rope," the engineer smiled up in reply.

"You seem to approve?" growled the skipper, challenging at once.

"Nay—nay. I just make notes o' what comes my way . . . an' I'm remembering sairtain conversations we've had in days gone by an' wonderin'—just wonderin'!"

Captain Bin turned and left the bridge with a curt order to Henry Nairn who stood with lifted glasses searching the horizon—

"Look out you don't run up against anything while I get changed," said he.

II

The *Nelson* continued to push a muddy hill before her which foamed and broke on the bluff of her bows, trailed off into hissing bubbles and formed her wake. It was a quiet day. Captain Bin made comfortable by a dry outfit stood on the bridge shooting occasionally his cuffs and anon the sun.

For years he had neglected the sun in favour of the colour of the mud he sailed. His boast was that he could find his way blindfold from the Maas to the Thames in weather as thick as pease-pudding. But since his sleeves had been decorated by the insignia of a rank which was legitimately his, he had adopted the views of "his brother officers" and called in navigation to aid him. It seemed wise, for hitherto his voyages had been accomplished by means usually known as rule-of-thumb. Now he

took cross-bearings and angles on every possible occasion ; noted the time on a four-point bearing to a decimal ; pestered the mates for azimuths and amplitudes ; and had, one night, a smack at the stars, much to Harry Nairn's dismay, in the hope of obtaining a latitude. Harry Nairn remained on the bridge while Captain Bin worked up that sight ; but failed to discover any note of latitude when he wrote up the log at eight bells. It seemed that Captain Bin had failed. *Poverino !*

But behind these signals, which any seaman can read, was a stiffening, a return to that beautiful conception of duty and sacrifice which is part of the birthright of all boys who go to sea. Hitherto this conception had been blurred and smudged by the ignominy of the man's environment ; but now, suddenly, almost miraculously, rank had become his and he was conscious of the old outlook. He did not know that it had been his when as a boy he clambered about chests and bunks in the half deck of a windjammer. He accepted the thing as it stood—because, forsooth, the King had seen in the humble effort of a coasting skipper, matter for praise, and had ordained

that henceforth he should figure on the *Nelson's* pay-sheet as Lieutenant Bin, R.N.R. That was an outstanding event in the man's life. It caused the blood to circulate more stirringly. It pulled him back to a recognition of the heritage which is Ours, and was his, and he shot his cuffs with a pride which long had drowsed.

War had produced this change in him. It had given him his chance, and now, as he plodded to and fro the bridge which held him prisoner, the noise of it rolled down to keep him alive.

They were fighting over there amidst the sands Zeebrugge way. The Navy was in there, snaking in waters scarcely deep enough to float the old *Nelson*. The guns boomed. As they drew nearer they boomed more heavily and the *Nelson* jarred as she moved solemnly in the greyness. Everywhere it was grey. Sea and sky were blurred in one soft monotint. Drops of moisture clung trembling to the bridge rails and ridge ropes. It was calm here; but over there the guns belched fire and iron on enemy battalions struggling amidst the floods and mud of Flanders. These men

had tried by all means of devilment to push through and reach Calais. Would they yet succeed, or would "our chaps" backed by the Fleet, hold them up and finally drive them from the land they had so wickedly ravished? If the Fleet could get at them then would they never reach Calais, or any whither but the red earth which held them. The guns boomed. Captain Bin, staring through binoculars, pretended he saw and warmed to the notion. He marched again, jostling with pride. The Fleet was there, the silent Fleet as they called it ashore, giving them socks.

Boom!

A heavier note rolled through the waste, jarring the taut steel girders and ties which went to make the *Nelson's* frame. She quaked in every nerve and limb as the roar went sobbing in the murk. It spoke of heavy stress out there on the coast. It rolled for an interval like thunder. The still air shook under successive waves of sound and again Captain Bin halted to search a skyline which was invisible.

Nothing to be seen of it all. Nothing—nothing. And out there perhaps those Sausages were busy with their scandalous methods of

war—shooting civilians, driving women and kids before them as they moved to the attack, stabbing the wounded, gassing those who stood to confront them—gassing them! Captain Bin considered this iniquity as he stared. It seemed that when a man was gassed he did not die, he was not even wounded; but he was unable to stand. He rolled gasping horribly for breath. They said he was drowning on dry land, just as a fish drowns in the air we breath. This appealed to him. He knew what it was. He had seen men drown—and once in the far-off days he had heard, as he lay on the deck and others brought him to.

It was said, too, that a man who was gassed and recovered must go the rest of his days burdened by some terrible disease. That was more horrible still. The sea, if a man won back from it, never maimed. It was clean in its methods. It would slay . . . but this . . . this was damnable. A nation which wrought in horrors must be pushed off the face of the earth, from the sea it strove to control, out, out into the hell men believe is prepared for those who are unclean . . .

But—it might be that these tales were

exaggerated. It was possible they had no basis in fact. He had heard, who has not, how a story grows and is added to by each teller until nothing of its origin is found. And, at the back of his mind there arose a questioning of all these reports of murder and slaughter whether on the high seas or in the trenches. With a sudden curb on his imagination he asked whether it were not possible that these Boches were maligned. They denied it most strenuously and some of the papers which Captain Bin had been in the habit of reading, threw doubts upon it also. He decided that it would be necessary to be quite sure before believing all that was said. Why, now he remembered it, the President of the United States, a more pregnant authority in Captain Bin's opinion, had refused to condemn.

As he marched, with the guns booming their message, Captain Bin came the full circle. His creed for years had been pacifism, not of the clamorous brand it is true, but still pacifism. He found now that it was essential to move slowly, to be very sure. In spite of his rank and the King's command, he must not allow Mrs. Bin or the Reverend Mr. Thomas to catch

him tripping. For they would crow. Lord! A vision of it dawned.

He marched wet decks with the moisture dripping from aloft with every crashing volley from the unseen guns. He marched there throbbing—hot, cold; hot, cold. It was plain, at all events, that they were going at it hammer and tongs, Zeebrugge way, and the wind was coming out easterly. Light, very light, it came, trailing over the land. Easterly! Again there followed the sequence in his thoughts. Easterlies all the world over mean difficulty for man; but easterlies, to-day, mean gas attacks in the trenches of Flanders and France. That treacherous, hell-found method of war prepared by the chemists of Germany for torturing mankind. God! He questioned was it true. Could it be true of the Germans he had met? He had commanded hundreds, carried thousands—could it be true of these men? And if so, then all the other things of which they were accused came in line . . . He marched the bridge sniffing the breeze which stole over Flanders flats, questioning, prepared to accept evidence if it came.

And far off the thing which was to satisfy

him winged swiftly east, searching the sea. It came back humming as it had gone, but wrathful from repulse. Captain Bin did not see it, nor, for that matter did any soul on board the little coaster. She plodded London-ward, carrying her cargo of eggs and farm produce for the nation which expected it at her hands, and would complain if it failed to arrive. Captain Bin, indeed, saw the smoke of a steamer blobbed upon the horizon and watched it grow with that interest a man bestows on the sole moving object within ken ; but he had no great thought connected with it, no stirring or premonition. He was busy searching the sea for periscopes, drift mines, and mindful of the necessity to avoid those fields where they were sown.

And the winged thing humming from the west espied the blob of smoke even as Captain Bin. It drew over from the Essex shore, whence it had been chased by British airplanes, driven seaward and given the opportunity of death or flight.

So it whirred homeward carrying a full cargo of bombs and searching the dim seas for some less formidable enemy. It desired

some peaceful, unarmed, slow-moving thing that it might bomb and report to Berlin as a troopship on transport of sorts. The pilot who directed it desired recognition and had visions of displacing the great Hindenburg in Germany's affections. He desired especially to bomb the ship of some Englander, to be the first to sink one from the skies even as the *Unterseeboten* sunk them from the depths. The *Kultured* crime of torpedoing unarmed merchantmen was beginning to pall with Berliners. Their old God quavered approval, where, in the beginning he had bravo-ed. These things are sad to consider from the cab of a Taube driven by too great a demonstration from the legitimate business of bombing a great city.

When the blob of smoke had increased sufficiently it became necessary for Captain Bin to take his glasses from their case and examine it for signs of a funnel and masts. In the old peaceful days this would not have occurred. Captain Bin would have saved his eyes. More, he, in common with the majority of these prescient bridge-people, who guide vessels in home waters, would have told you

the name of the ship by the colour of her smoke. To-day, however, it becomes necessary to examine more closely. New coal-mines have come into existence ; others are on strike, coal has been imported—all the world is conspired to compel sailors to use their eyes. Therefore Tom Bin stared.

He discovered twin thin masts which in peace times doubtless carried a wireless installation, and a funnel which proclaimed her to be a London trader bound for the Hook. She would be light, there would be passengers on board—a dozen perhaps, or fifty—and she might carry a small mail. Nothing at all events to disturb the equanimity of sane fighters but sufficient to inflame the Huns. She was a good boat, a trader. There were three others of the same company, all running to the Hook, year in, year out.

Captain Bin, having decided these points, marched to and fro revolving the queer medley of happenings which had come to an Island Nation since August 1914. Things had become terribly complicated. Everybody's apple-cart had been upset, and now, to add to the confusion there was all this talk about

compulsion, and fighting compulsion, that had troubled both the skipper and mate. Although Captain Bin was a Lieutenant in the R.N.R., he was not in the fighting line. He recognized that he was a supernumerary, or as Authority put it, he held an honorary commission only; yet if compulsion came in, or any real necessity arose, he would be wanted for the Navy and so would Harry Nairn. Harry Nairn had no Mrs. Bin to goosewing his movements. He was free to do as he listed; but Captain Bin was not free. When a man is goosewinged by a woman his condition is sad. He fights with one arm, walks with one leg, thinks with one side of his brain and argues with the other. As a matter of fact he is handicapped. Although he did not know it, in all great affairs, if Mrs. Bin was present, it became necessary to efface Captain Bin.

He marched the bridge considering these things and the blob of smoke grew into a cloud which twisted ever denser and blacker from the funnel of that boat bound for the Hook of Holland. It increased until Harry Nairn who stood in his corner to leeward watching and surprised, drew his hand across his mouth and said—

"Seems to be firing up a lot over there, sir. No hurry either."

Captain Bin halted and used his glasses—"H'm!" he said. "You're right. Waste o' coal."

"It's not as though he could get in before dark either," the mate pursued.

The skipper had nothing to add. He stood there using his glasses as did the mate, marking a drone which had come into the air and had no relation to the spasmodic gun-fire from the coast.

"What's that?"

Captain Bin was the first to appreciate it. He twisted on his heel to search the east for signs of attack, for periscopes, Zeppelins, any of the new-fangled methods of destruction coming from the enemy country astern. He could see nothing. The air was like soup. But the drone grew in volume until the mate, his eyes glued to binoculars suddenly cried out—

"Why, she's put her helm hard over, sir. She's cutting across our hawse!"

Round came Captain Bin, anger in his gaze. "Ring stand by!" he snapped and stood

searching the driven steamer. "Maybe he's sighted a mine," he added after a moment. "Go dead slow! Don't like that buzzin' . . . seems to me it's aircraft of some kind." He swept the distance ahead without glasses and suddenly checked. "Got him!" he ejaculated, happy in discovery. "It's a sausage for a dollar."

Out of the mist above the fleeing steamer came the thing that hummed. Like a stick set horizontally in the dimness it grew swiftly from tenuity, became definite and explanatory with a pyramid of turgid water towering white and high beside the Hook boat.

Captain Bin twisted to face the mate. "Right again!" he announced, "Missed though. Good God! Was it—was it a bomb?"

Flags fluttered from the bridge of the Hook boat and the mate deciphered them: "Keep your course," they said.

Captain Bin nodded. He stood straddle-legged staring into the murk. "Full-speed," he gave out, conscious of the necessity to do something, and again a bomb fell from the fluttering machine in the air. The Hook boat

came round on her heel, twisting eight points with the swirl of a destroyer marking her curve, while Captain Bin choked out—

"See that, Nairn? What did I say?" He stared at the mate with incredulous eyes. "That was a bomb . . . missed though. It's a Taube, Henry Nairn, and don't you forget it. Call Sandy McFuz . . . it's a blasted, didderin' German, Boche-plane . . . and we haven't a match we can hit with . . . Hands on deck! Ready the boats . . ."

The mate blew a signal on the *Nelson's* fat hooter and the small crew came tumbling out. They lined up at their stations aware of necessity. Harry Nairn reported, and standing beside the skipper said—

"But it's the Hook boat, sir . . . Surely he can't want . . ."

Captain Bin smashed that. "Just what he does want. Hook boat or Hell boat murder is what he's after . . . Look at that, and that! He's trainin' his damned machine-gun on her . . . an' she can't answer no more than we can, can't do anything but blow her whistle . . . Oh my God! If I was up alongside you, my son, I'd give you socks!"

He apostrophized the Taube, not the Almighty, and marched hot to the compass. "Keep a look-out there!" he ordered. "Watch out for mines, periscopes . . . all hands."

The hum had long since passed into a whir and a jangle of valves as the machine sloped nearer, hovering, kite-like in gait, kite-like in aim; but without the kite's necessity. Here rending was imperative in order to hearten the guileless, spoon-fed Teuton and to provide a sensational paragraph for Teuton scribblers, preaching as ever Bernhardi's gospel of frightfulness. And the Hook-boat swerved, escaping once again a shot which was aimed to slay.

"Four! How many does the beast carry—ten, fifty?"

"God knows."

"Let 'em all come!" chanted a man on the lower deck, ricking his neck to see.

One came in a blinding crash of spat flame, revealing a hit far aft where the boats hung and passengers were grouped attempting to aid sailors who prepared them. Another, from a Taube low enough now to see precisely the character of his swerving, driven steamer which would figure in Berlin as a trooper. And again

a hit which roared with a double crash as the boilers were touched. Steam belched forth, white against the muddy air The Hook boat lurched. She lay sloping gradually, and facing the ditch. People slithered from her higher side like apples shaken from a tree. She wobbled there horribly facing the end, and the Taube, satisfied here, pushed on to visit other fields. She climbed, her eye on that slow moving old *Nelson* which doggedly approached. Another Englander ! Hoch ! Never will they learn—never will they learn ! She drew near, this Englander, and would rescue those drowning devils who, with their Navy, aim to starve German women and children ; who, with their too-contemptible army had created this drawn-out war when three months, without her, would have seen it complete. Englander ? Who shall say ? If she be not Englander then Dane or Dutch or Norwegian, tribes all of them sympathetic and itching for her favours. Give her a bomb !

The Taube mounting on a slow spiral drew nearer, and Captain Bin recognized the peril for what it was. He turned sharply on the mate—

"Get you into the wheelhouse," he ordered, "and keep your eye on my hand. If they get me come out an' keep her zigzaggin'. Pass me my rifle and cartridges out of the chart-house. And you"—he faced the crew gaping from below the bridge—"get under cover!"

The machine approached roaring. She seemed immense, fateful the black crosses on the tips of her wings prophetic. Captain Bin marched with the sense of shrugged apprehension; yet in truth he marched erect. He could see the observer working at something, a machine-gun perhaps, and heard with a curious aloofness McFuz hailing him from the fiddley grating: "Mind your eye, Skip . . . it's auld Horny beyant that gun."

There came a spatter of bullets upon the bridge deck in verification of this, but none touched either skipper or engineer.

Then McFuz saw Tom Bin lie down as the machine passed just wide of the rail—lie down and blaze away a full clip. One, two, three, four, five—the magazine empty, the Taube roaring into the mist ahead, the Hook boat busy with her last plunge.

Tom Bin climbed to his feet rubbing a bruised

shoulder: "Takes some hitting, Sandy, lad," he cried cheerily.

"Might as well blow peas at her," McFuz announced. "She's armoured. Look out he doesn't get o'er ye or he will drop ye a bomb."

"Starboard hard!" said the skipper. "Wi' God's help we'll dodge him." Then quite suddenly he flushed and added: "Yes—I mean that. Wi' God's help, Sandy. Get down below an' whack 'er up . . . then say me a prayer."

"I wull," said the engineer. "It's o'er due."

The ship swerved as the Taube banked to come round, swerved in the *Nelson* way, as a 'bus of the old type skidded with locked wheels in the Strand. She tried to look at her track, which was unusual, to bring her walrus-like headpiece to gaze at this caper; but McFuz was on the stokehold plates singing hymns in the ears of two stripped firemen, and she gave up the attempt. Besides, the attraction of that Thing which buzzed over her was enormous. The noise of it seemed to churn the muddiness into wrath; but the sea was calm.

As it approached Captain Bin suddenly by imperceptive signal steadied the helm, then slapped it hard aport. The manœuvre suc-

ceeded and again the Taube climbed, and banked twisting while the skipper let off another clip. He saw no result after firing, but shouted brazenly to the mate: "If I can't bring her down I can keep her from coming too near. Steady helm!" He turned to the engine room tube and hailed Mc Fuz: "Whack her up, lad. Give her all you know!"

Again the Taube came to greet them, nose-dived and loosed a bomb from scarce three hundred feet. It struck just abaft the engine-room with a blare of red flame; and two of the *Nelson's* men fell to ricochetting bullets from the machine-gun as the whirring monster passed astern.

Bin came to the rail and instantly gave the signal for "Fire stations. Aft there, my sons. Get the hoses on her!"

No resounding bugle or shrill whistle from bo'sun here; just Harry Nairn and a handful of sailormen to fight the fire, win or lose.

And as they trailed hose under the bridge the airplane mounted with a fusillade which mercifully failed in direction, and Captain Bin twisted once more to watch for her return. What were the odds? Would she succeed as in the case of the Hook boat, or would the

old *Nelson* stern-wag her way once more into the Thames unharmed? It was a toss up. Captain Bin knew that it would be impossible always to elude so swift a machine, impossible to avoid the end if she risked coming near. He prayed for a gun, for something mounted aft there which would enable him to compete on easier terms—then he would show them something tall in the way of——

"Hullo!"

He stared. The Taube was taking an almighty big sweep. Was she coming back, or was she . . . Tom Bin felt for the first time a tingling sensation which alarmed him. He lifted his cap. His forehead dripped moisture . . . . She was off. She was not coming back! She was off for the coast with her record for the encouragement of Germany—

"One British troopship sunk with all on board, a second which strove to help the first set on fire . . . Hoch! Hoch!"

McFuz noting the silence climbed once more to the fiddley grating to look out. He saw and raised his voice—

"Gaen?" he asked.

"Had no more bombs," gurgled Captain Bin.

"Oor luck!" said the engineer.

"God's mercy," the skipper prophesied. Then with a sudden twist. "Any casualities?"

"Twa—one shot through the heed; the ither, may be aye, may be no. Wi' nursin' he should do."

The skipper took a deep breath. He stared a moment at the engineer then crossed to the the wheelhouse and looked in.

"Starboard!" he ordered. "Get that mush of wreckage on our bow and steady her there. I'm goin' down to see what we can pick up, McFuz. Send any spare hands ye have on deck and we will find them a job."

He was going to be busy. A fire raged aft. A wounded *matelot* must be doctored. A ship's company and passengers were frogging it over there waiting to be rescued. He was going to be very busy indeed.

. . . . . .

Yet they crept into the Thames within twelve hours of scheduled time. They crept in with a scorched and half flooded compartment, with twenty-seven survivors from the sunken Hook boat and a skipper certain he was born for the Navy. Then, with their load of eggs and farm produce for a nation wroth

at the prices it was paying for breakfast dishes, the *Nelson* wormed up to the docks and found them crammed.

So she toddled off and lay at a buoy in midstream till her eggs stank and the sides of bacon became mouldy. Then when she bid fair to cause a plague among shipmen, Authority called her alongside and the cargo for which sailors had fought and two had died was passed up to make fuel for the City's Destructor.

So was the last straw laid in this matter of the metamorphosis of Captain Bin. Henceforth he would fight from the decks of a ship intended to fight; fight the Reverend Mr. Thomas if he opened his head on the subject of loving our enemies; fight Mrs. Bin and all the family of Bins if they attempted to prevent him fighting.

Here, too, Sandy McFuz came in, promising to back him.

You perceive the point of course?

Sandy McFuz, whose other name was Archibald, told the present historian there was a point. Therefore . . .

Bene quiescat!

THE CHANNEL'S VOICES.

A MAILSHIP lifted anchor in Plymouth Sound and stole through the yellowing dawn. She came past the breakwater with a premonitory gasp on her whistle ; avoided, by a species of legerdemain, an incoming Tramp ; then, settling on her course, broke away for her run to the south.

"In three days, if we have any sort of luck," said my friend, "we shall be sunning ourselves at Gib, while here they will continue to shiver."

The bell on the lighthouse we had passed continued to toll at intervals. It sounded like a knell.

I reflected on those words, "if we have luck," spoken by the captain. He was one of those whom I could scarcely consider in the light of a pessimist, nor one given to undue quibbling about external forces. Meanwhile he had gone to the bridge and now

stood beside the pilot. Two officers were on duty, one in either wing.

The sun pierced the mists as we came rippling upon a fleet of fishing-boats lying with flapping sails awaiting the breeze which should carry them home. They formed a deep-set barrier and seemed placed to bar our progress ; but we threaded the maze without a flutter. We slowed and put the pilot into the cockleshell sent to receive him ; passed the gaunt watch-tower of our sou'-western coast, with its stumpy predecessor lying shorn beside it, and entered the peopled Channel.

Astern a gun still boomed.

It is a street, this highway of ours, a street of modern times. It is full of blundering ne'er-do-wells who elbow rudely the gentlemanly Liners, the aristocratic Fighters and all the speedier world of ships, as loafers elbow the man who moves down town in a hurry. It is crammed, in certain pathways, as are the sidewalks of a city, with people who lounge, people who hasten, people who are careless of the rule of the road, who are criminally negligent ; people clad sometimes in rags, sometimes in furbelows. It holds, too, those who stand and stare blear-eyed at what is passing ;

as though, like the derelicts of our bars, they have guzzled and been turned out with empty pockets. It is the border-land of England, these Islands which are our home, and it is thronged by those who have made it and keep it free. It is the throat of the immenser ocean and across it go, at all times, in gale or calm, snow or driving rain, the messengers for other shores, carrying the wealth of England.

We see it from the cliffs lying in serrated lines of green and blue under the storm-cloud. We see it scintillating in a breeze, foam-tipped, blue, translucent. We see it at night speckled by moving lights; picturesque, fairy-like, or again, when mists oppress us, lying veiled and sad, echoing with the voices of those children who move upon its surface, far, far out, striving to make their presence known, like children, with little tin trumpets and cheeks puffed out in effort.

But the haze which looks so glorious from the cliffs is a peril to those who drive post-haste into the thick of it; the lines of colour so loved by artists, a danger to those who move amidst them. For these things mark unseen and nearly incalculable forces, one moon-driven, others formed by gales raging

deep in the heart of the Atlantic, by the inequalities of the ocean bed. No one can accurately gauge the effect of these forces. You may guess, you may use tables, consult charts and fill pages with calculations ; but for the man in a hurry, accident waits.

Eddystone had disappeared, its fog-signal was becoming faint, and my friend now stood in a corner of the bridge alone. I began to see what he had hinted at back there at the edge of the beautiful Sound. We had entered a strata of walled-in fog ; a space narrowed down to a small circle never more than a mile in diameter, which travelled with us. In the centre where we sped, the sun gleamed upon tiny wavelets, showing a surface nearly smooth and dappled by touches of the softest emerald ; but all about us, clinging to us as though we carried it, was the thin white haze veiling the horizon ; isolating us from the world of ships. Their voices came down to us in a growing chorus.

My friend crossed the bridge and halted beside the officer of the watch.

"Double the look-out," he said, "and put a quartermaster at the whistle cord," then he went back and stood as before.

From somewhere in the mist came a howl, the cry of a powerful siren rising horribly to a shriek. We answered.

As the sun gained altitude so the mist deepened. Overhead the sky remained blue and only thinly veiled. The air streamed past us, wet, wet like steam. The gulls swept screaming out of it, curved to search the wake with eyes alert for scraps ; turned somersaults, fought, vanished — then suddenly from the heart of the mist came a new signal : a small and wistful gasp, like the cry of a sheep with a brazen throat. "Baa ! Baa !"

I glanced at the bridge and saw that my friend was staring into the westward, though why he looked there was not apparent. He might, with equal relevance, I imagined, have searched the smoke pouring from our funnels. He came towards the officer at the binnacle and said—

"Ring stand-by," and a moment later came the order, "Quartermaster, sound our siren." The man pulled the cord and the instrument brayed a scale of appalling diatones.

"See anything ?" asked the captain.

"Nothing, sir," answered the officer.

"Slow."

The gong pealed and in less than a minute a notable change came over the ship. We no longer hissed through the broad ribbon of foam lying on either hand; but stole along with scarcely a perceptible quiver, the great hull vibrant, like a lately beaten drum. Then, into the silence came once more that illusive signal, saying simply, "Baa! Baa!" and the promenade became thick with people anxious to see.

The mist, the ring of blue sky and the dappled emerald water, pulsing in steam, met them—nothing else.

"Baa! Baa!" cried our unseen friend, feebly coughing her whereabouts, and again, "Baa! Baa!"

"What is it?" I questioned beneath the ladder, and the captain turned round. "A ship saying her prayers. Come up," he rejoined.

I obeyed as the siren again appealed to the world to give us room, and when its voice was dead there came once more that agitated cry from the sheep we had disturbed: "Baa! Baa! . . . Baa! Baa!"

I stared into the mist. There was nothing there. I glanced at my companion's face, it

told me nothing. I turned to look at the officer beside the binnacle, at the quartermaster waiting patiently to administer further ear-torture . . . their eyes said nothing and again I turned to stare into the fog.

There came from it voices crying with different shades of feeling: "Watch there, watch . . . watch there, watch!" as though a crowd of madmen jabbered of approaching danger.

It was weird. We could see nothing, yet it was plain that a vessel was close at hand, her crew engaged in taking soundings with the old-time patent of the 'sixties, a lump of lead and a line with knots. A splash echoed in the stillness and a voice remarked with a bird-like croak, "Look out there, aft!" and with that cry my friend moved swiftly to the wheelhouse: "Helm hard a starboard!" he ordered. "Full speed ahead starboard, astern port . . . See her, Harrison?"

"Aye, sir. She's moving up Channel."

The captain returned to my side. "Do you see her?" he questioned.

I shook sorrowfully a negative. There was nothing, nothing anywhere approaching the semblance of a ship. He pointed: "High up,"

he said. "Sails only," and I lifted my eyes in answer. "The devil would have made a sailor," he commented, "only he would not look aloft."

A blue-grey spread of canvas towered broad on our starboard bow, and as we swerved fast on our helm the clang of blocks and the creak of ponderous yards came to point how near had been our danger.

The ship faded away to the cry of her childish horn: "Baa! Baa! I am on the starboard tack!" she coughed, "Baa! Baa!" until our siren rose and drowned it. We stole again more swiftly down the treacherous lane of fog, making pauses to listen, and through the stillness came the clamour of steamers bellowing, the shriek of unseen sirens and amidst them, thrown hastily into gaps as it were, the wheezy notes of the sailing ship's trumpet—like the bleat of lonely sheep, astray on the marches.

Once or twice a grey shadow followed close upon the voice, then the helm buzzed, strange orders were snapped, and men moved swiftly to obey. Thus, for perhaps half an hour, we were cheek by jowl with collision; moving, stopping, twisting under the torture of our ear-splitting signals, then came silence. And out

of it, after a space, arrived the melancholy boom of a steamer. Her prow appeared with marvellous celerity it seemed, and again the helm buzzed. A little fish-cutter, rusty, heavy with food for the British Nation, and sunk deep by her stern-placed engines, rushed our length, a fussy bow-wave white about her stem. In three minutes she was gone, her voice rolling dolefully in the mist. "She has to move," said my friend, answering my astonishment; "if *her* skipper went slow because of fog, he need not turn up next time her people sign on."

I stared into the steaming air. We crept at half speed only and the silence wrapped us as blankets wrap us from cold. There was nothing in sight. The sun shone upon our narrow mirror. About us the waters shimmered, green, blue, vanishing in lines of mist. Half an hour thus, then a heavy, distant bellow to which we responded with a shriek. Again the warning note, vibrating, immense: "Booo!" a long-drawn gasp and my friend turned to me with: "One of the greyhounds. I fancy our tracks will converge. You will see how records are made, despite the fogs."

He turned to the officer standing conning our course: "Tell them to stand by below.

Warn the crow's nest . . . anywhere on the starboard side," he ordered abruptly.

We pushed slowly onward. Our decks were crowded with people all agog, cognizant, perhaps, of danger, watching the officers and listening. Suddenly a rocket broke high in the west and my friend pointed to the smoke-balls descending through the thinner strata. "A signal," he said. "She is out there. Listen! Hear that?" he asked.

That was the thud of propellers water-borne to our ears, and a moment later came the deep-toned roar of a steam horn.

Shriek, boom . . . shriek, boom, that was the order of things and neither signal gave the remotest notion of how the signaller moved. Just two ear-splitting sounds: a siren on the one hand, a hooter on the other, and, on either side a new chorus of frightened sheep bleating nervously: "Baa! Baa! . . . Baa! Baa!"

"Boo!" The note throbbed close after an interval and in an instant my friend cried out: "Full speed ahead, both engines!" He stood unflustered to watch.

The screws kicked out with a fine flurry of churned water as the ship hung vibrant and gathering way; then with a dash, it seemed,

we pushed ahead. The crow's nest tong-tonged, sending messages in italics: "Vessel broad abeam!" and a quartermaster opened our siren valve, shouting our intent.

The grim, black nose of an Atlantic grey-hound broke out of the mist showing a curl of white at the forefoot. She came on with a growling rumble, the bow wave flashing emerald and white, her hooter muttering like a lion aroused.

"Boo!" It was as one might say: "Get out of my way before I hurt you, run over you, crush you," and we, suddenly dwindled to a pigmy, flourished propellers hastening to obey.

But the great ship, if she moved swiftly, had alert guides. They saw us, marvellously gathered our intent, and with a deft touch sheered slightly and passed our stern. She seemed to point scornfully to the reality of her monstrons power; to the delicate organism by which, in any circumstances, she could manœuvre; to the disdain she felt for all our species—sprats, minnows of the sea. She approached in silent indifference, her funnels belching smoke and crusted white from the fight she had endured; her decks crammed

with people staring as we stared, thrilling as we thrilled.

A gong clanged high on her bridge. An officer approached her rail and looked over the screen. He signalled with his hand and again a rocket flared to the zenith.

She made no sign, asked no question, offered no advice ; but passed foaming and vibrant into the mist, her port-holes, her brass work, the whole castellated side of her for a moment aflame. Then with a muttering roar slid into the fog—immense, throbbing, flashing detonators to warn men of her passage.

"Engines half speed," said my friend with stern brevity. "Sound our whistle automatically."

Then we too passed onward through the wall of fog ; but like a dog fresh from the whip—tail down.

"You will remember," said the captain as he crossed to the binnacle, "I said, 'if we have luck.'"

THE TRAMP

She came through the greyness from the black north, burrowing like a mole in seas that rolled unceasingly to meet her.

The Tyne built her. Miners had delved for her far in the bowels of the earth ; ironworkers had fashioned her, sweating, black of face. Then when she was ready they decked her with flags as for a gala ; and a girl, dressed in costly silks and furbelows, and wearing a black picture hat, gave her her name. She called her the *Magician*, speaking the word with an accent quite faultless.

A cynical person standing to watch the launch described her as a triumph of engineering audacity, and surmised that she would be dirty in a sea-way. She was. But, at the moment she looked clean and particular and spinster-like in her nice grey coat, white collars and cuffs, and a funnel elaborately ribboned in red and yellow.

So they loaded her with four thousand tons

of north country diamonds, and sent her through the dock gates to blacken the wharves at Colombo, and to frighten the shipping in Channel. A thing of steel with a bow like a barn and a stern like a pillow; with two stumped masts standing decorously apart, and a pair of grapnel anchors set in her hawse like the fangs of a walrus. She grinned at the seas she was christened to lord.

The grey Channel had nothing to say to her. The liners examined her, tongue in cheek; but at the edge of the Bay, where white spume rolled mistily towards Ushant, the seas which had swung sleepily to greet her all the way from her home in the north, rose, took a new *motif* and rushed spluttering to maim her.

The *Magician* burrowed, mole-wise in the pother, kicking her heels as the mole kicks, spilling the seas as a mole spills earth. Sportively, with a clean face and shining ribbons, she fronted the rollers at six o'clock. With a light heart, in the plenitude of her strength and youth, she entered on the dark watches of her first night in the Bay; and the gale, marking her gutter-like approach, settled down to speak in italics. Seas charged where before they had ambled.

Seas leaped to destroy where before they had sluggishly strolled. It was dark; dark as the mines from whence she and her diamonds were sprung; dark as the lives of the men who manned her.

Her decks were of steel, her sides were of steel, her bridge, her masts, her houses, her bunks, her rigging were of steel, and each individual bit of her sung its own tune, triumphantly innocent of harmony. She shrieked at the butts, groaned at the plates, whistled at the engines, purred at the boilers; and when the seas smote her, her voice rang out amidst the boom of a monstrous drum. An unending hum heralded her approach.

Four bells! Ten o'clock, and silence as a roller drew breath for an effort . . . silence, then with lifted head and a brazen whistle she reeled at her bath and floundered over, bridge deep in brine. She revelled in the seas as a child revels in a warm tub before the nursery fire; she lay down in them as a child lies sprawling at the edge of a beach kicking pink heels at the sun. The waters clucked past her laughing; the declivities, the chasms, the

spewing foam-stretches harmed her not at all ; it was her crew that stood to be shot at. She objected to crews. They appeared futile, unnecessary. She put down her head with a swirl, grumbling audibly she could get to Colombo quite well without them. Was she not the *Magician*, the triumph of that yard which had built her ?

On the bridge men faced the turmoil undismayed. The Bay was up to its games as usual. Good—let it whirl. The engine-room telegraph standing at full speed, pointed distinctly to the attitude of the bridge. The Bay ! Well . . . she would be christened early.

The captain, a thick-set man standing beating numbed fingers behind the small dodger, had no qualms on the subject. She was a punching machine. A thing of modern invention given to rollicking moods, fearless of the elements, chattering like a steam-roller, supremely disdainful of her lords and their bones.

She wallowed sidelong at a monster solemnly ambling from the Atlantic, and the water gushed about her decks as it gushes amidst

the rocks at the edge of the land. She stood up to look at her accomplishment, her walrus fangs spouting misty streamlets into the void —and nothing had happened!

Incredible! Absurd! She had twisted cunningly at the onset; she had driven deep into the heart of that straight wall, flicked with her heels, and . . . Nothing?

The clang of a punching machine assailed her. Her rivets chattered as she lifted to hear, and . . . Nothing?

Her crew stood in their places marking her march—one man on the fiddley nursing his pipe, one on the look-out clinging to the rail, a third on the bridge twisting the little iron wheel—the *Magician's* watch all told. The *Magician's* watch safe, but drenched; safe, but gloomily blasphemous. They were at their posts eyeing the leaden sea, waiting for eight bells and cursing the fate which had made them sailors.

The night was black, the wind a gale in force. The noise of a steam-roller grinding flints in a roadway blurred all speech. It was as though she sought to drown it, to keep her actions hid, her movement a mystery . . .

then came a new sorrow to test men's vision —rain from the south. The *Magician* lolled brazen to meet it and the rain drew a curtain to hide her. She was ugly. She staggered as a drunken man staggers at the houses spanning his path. She advertised her approach with a blob of smoke. It seemed necessary to shroud her—therefore the Bay sent rain.

Eight bells!

"Eeya! Thank God for that," said the mate as he struck it.

Far off in the murk and shadows where the side lamps threw misty light upon the spray, red here, green there, the man on look-out duty repeated the signal. The notes carried bridge-ward by the gale, droned comfortably of sleep. The watch would go below, turn in, light their pipes, go to sleep; the mate would go below, write up the log, smoke, pull off his boats, sleep. Another mate, another watch would stand to face the racket . . . "Eeya! Thank God for that."

There followed an interval; three minutes, five, then the clang of an iron door heralded the approach of footsteps dodging amidst the lifelines. The watch had turned out. They

came to relieve those who were sodden. They moved slowly, circumspectly, down there where the water hissed and roared. Then swiftly they clung to their lines, to stanchions, anywhere, watching it leap. The *Magician*, bent on new antics, prodded at this moment with her nose at a mountain.

It advanced to greet her, to greet the watch. From the caves of the sou'-west it rolled booming to greet them . . . and the *Magician* prodded with her nose!

Three men, one mate, faced it. They were the watch, come drowsily from the humours of a forecastle of steel, the mate from a tub on the deck of his room which no wash-boards could defend. They advanced by stages, aiming for the bridge ladder. The mate reached first and climbed; but the crew, the three who comprised the *Magician's* port-watch, having run the gauntlet of the fore-deck, clung to the lifelines waiting their opportunity.

"Now!" said one, "now's the time, sons!"

He acted on the word and reached the ladder in safety.

"*Gott-for-tam!*" said the second and climbed to the look-out spluttering. "Vet alreaty . . .

Schwein!" He spat upon her, complaining. A sodden companion received him, grinned, passed the orders and escaped unimpressed.

But the third, the "farmer" of the watch, and doubly a farmer, seeing he was green to the sea and its moods, halted alone on the fore-deck inquiring precisely of his ship-mates—

"Hey yous! Veech vay I go . . . veech vay?"

No one answered. Indeed no one heard. But the *Magician* saw him leaving the lifelines and made ready to greet him. She floundered at a sea and rolled mammering in its grip. It moved swiftly—a black smudge against the sky-line crossing the man's path, and he squealed. Like a stuck pig he cried out, floating breast high on the flood. The decks sloped under him preparing a glissade, and he crossed like a plank, end on. The squeal died. But a note of it had swept bridge-ward on the gale and the captain still standing beating numbed feet beside the dodger cried out to know who shouted.

"What's wrong?" he repeated. "Hi! there . . . who's singing out?" Then again, as a new notion struck him. "Relieve the wheel and no nonsense."

The wheel was relieved, the look-out relieved, the "farmer" relieved; for out there in the blackness the squealer bobbed in a new environment. Unmindful now of charging seas, unmindful of the crash and jar of seas, unmindful indeed that it was he who had squealed.

But at four bells, two weary and drenching hours later, the mate scratched in the log-book with a hand that dripped rivulets of brine—

"One of the crew, shipped as John Johnson, missing. Supposed to have been washed overboard. Heavy gale. Wind S.W. Vessel labouring badly."

The *Magician* flung up her heels, revelling in the foam-stretches. "One!" she said, and dived like a herring on the approach of a dog-fish.

THE MONSTER

HER calling was that of a collier, yet some one had the audacity to christen her *Venus*. It is quite possible she had other names, but this was the one stencilled on her bow and on her stern.

Outward with coal, homeward with ore, carrying her cargo scuppers gurgling, like a vulgar feeder sucking noisily at his soup—that was her business. From Cardiff to Gib or Lisbon, from Barry to Gib or Malta, hazarding sometimes a trip so far afield as Taganrog or Sulina, but more generally home from Bilboa; home over the grey waters, home through the sunshine, home through the gales, wallowing, erratic, carrying coal or ore or grain for the British Nation—that was her destiny.

Men were paid to stand on her deck and tend her. The glorious red ensign of England gave a touch of colour to her general ugliness. Once for a novelty she appeared newly painted,

wearing bright vermilion bands on her funnel; but that was when she came gorgeously from the hands of her builders. Afterwards she was painted in sections, and rust and grease were her flamboyant dress; grey grease in dabs, to make her slip through the seas without spilling them.

She was commanded by a Swede, so said her Articles; but the crew had doubts and called him Dutchy, when it was obvious Holland had no part in him. He was squarely built, a man who never smiled, who, when his ship drove sidelong at a quay wall she was escaping, crunching a boat in the process, watched with dull eyes and said—"So! This *Venus* haff ze lug of der teufel. Ve vant no poats . . . so! give it lib, Misder Made, give it lib or somesings vill habben."

Now the way in which Mister Mate gave it lip was through the neck of a steam siren of marvellous power, chromatic in tone. She used it to clear a passage, which, considering the country's necessities in the early war days, was not praiseworthy. Mister Mate, too, had an opinion over which he frowned. He said that someday something would happen to knock

Dutchy off his perch. He said as much to the patriots who employed him, pointing especially to the man's hatred of w's ; but they snubbed him for his pains. That made it worse.

The Channel, the Bay, the Mediterranean, the gulls and gambolling porpoise all knew the *Venus*. They had seen her in gales, in calms, and every species of devilment. They had listened to her groans, marked her contortions, sighted her fins churning the water to foam, and had cowered breathless at the noise of her siren. The birds had learned to hate it ; the seas had decided to drown it. Yet she was old and had escaped. The rust on her sides should have made underwriters chary of accepting the risk ; but she was comfortably insured by the firm who made money out of her and sent strange men, speaking strange tongues, to tend her.

Out of the dock gates she strayed one morning, winches clattering, fins churning, and Dutchy, who still ruled her, looked up with his formula : "Give it lib, Misder Made, give it lib !" Then white from its throat thrilled the voice of the siren—two jets of steam heralding

it, and the gulls swept clear to avoid it. They screamed raucously at the din.

The Channel lying mistily at ease, passively lazy under skies of lead, rilled at the noise with offence. It was angry. It laid hands to ears. The sun sank flushed. A curtain of steam drew past it, veiling the great red disc of it, hiding it, whispering of the necessity for dignity, here, in the presence of the cold, grey sea which would presently couch it. It whispered, too, of the necessity for restraint; and over the dim waters the gulls swept screaming.

Rusty, patched like a target, wearing the dishevelled and cantankerous air of one just emerged from a gin palace, the *Venus* moved out to face the wide, still sea; to frighten the gulls, to slash with her tail at the fishes, and to astonish with her antics the sedater shipping.

In all her life nothing had harmed her permanently; she was of steel. In all her life not once had she sunk like the goddess in foam; but thrice she had practised ramming and had watched while a sister had explored "the cellar." In all her life never had she stranded; but, in avoiding her, a liner once took lodgings on the edge of the Nore, and

the underwriters said things in their sleeves which never appeared in her policy.

There were others, too, those braw little fishermen with the red-sailed boats, the trawlers and netters who, remembering her methods, hove in gear at the sight of her coming.

The seas could not hinder her—she was pushed by a screw with manganese blades. The fogs could not stifle her—she bellowed her advent on a siren that scared. Unlike Venus, she was heavy and waistless and angular; but like Venus she was naked and unashamed. Nothing on her head, nothing on her feet; no girdle, no furbelows—all plain, dividend earning iron and steel, bare even to nudity.

Ships coming up astern passed her swiftly—for she was slow, slow as the "Dutchman" pacing her bridge. Ships meeting her by day steered to give her room—half the Channel if need be. Ships coming upon her at night decided that her crew was drunk, perhaps dotty, and swept out of her path as though she were plague-ridden. But her crew was not drunk, nor was she ridden by any plague but penury. She steered like a barn—that is

all. Her rudder was as ineffectual as the screw was effectual in twisting her. For definite safety the channels required widening. In a sea-way anything might happen.

Yet, in the docks and at shipping offices, were found men willing to experiment with her—men who perhaps would starve if they did not sign on and kow-tow to the personage who ordered her.

The skipper, when he found time for thought, decided somewhere behind the mask "that someday somesings vould habben," and straightway blew a nose with the noise of a miniature siren. The "sailors," Dutchmen or Dagoes every soul, let fall a doubt of her safety as they watched her, and prayed for the end of the trip. They said "she took the whole ocean for her course," dressing the phrase according to their taste and nation.

Lopsided, spluttering, breathing wheezy blobs of blackness, she strolled, then, to the gates of the sea, and the Channel opened its mouth to receive her. It tucked her up in a haze it had brewed for her coming, hiding her, struggling to stifle that siren, splitting the silence up there by her funnel. But Nature

was powerless here. The sea moaned restlessly deciding that. Nothing but drowning could still it.

Then came night. The *Venus* uncovered her eyes, green here, red there, white high above the twain, mistily sweeping the greyness. Sometimes all three went out. Sometimes only one smouldered when day looked over the edge of the world for events.

Past Flatholm, past Steepholm she yawed, still finning her passage, bluff as a dustman. Near Scarweather she sighted an incoming liner, a Bristolian successful thus far from New York, and essayed to scare her with the siren. "Whouf! Whouf! I am hoping to starboard," she announced, grim of face, muscles twitching, and promptly ambled to port. The liner asked no questions. She hastened her footsteps, describing a circle to baffle her, and swept into space untouched but profane. The *Venus* brayed merrily her triumph. Like a cock she strained her neck crowing at the solitudes.

"If you vish to starboard in ziss *Venus*, you moust bort for ze breliminary ganters," said the skipper to his mate. "So! That ish

goodt ! . Give it lib, Misder Mate, give it lib."

And Mister Mate, at the end of the cord, a man with no illusions, no enthusiasm, no hope, gave it lip—mournfully, a prolonged tort ; a blast covering a minute of time.

The *Venus* swept onward thrilling.

Lundy, in the small hours, caught a glimpse of her triangle heading serenely for the Hen and Chickens ; and the lighthouse, anticipating a wreck, instantly liberated a charge which crashed at the zenith to warn her. But the *Venus* just smiled. She was yawing, not yawning, simply and harmlessly yawing.

Her skipper looked up with the notion of romance—

"Onze," he announced with an air, "I gome town here mit my *Venus*, andt it plow——pough ! like mountains ; andt my *Venus* gould not loog id in the faze. Durn roundt she did. Vant to go 'ome again. Dired out, zick of the sea, like her boss. So I say to her, '*Venus*,' I say, 'durn roundt again andt ve go starn virst . . . andt pe tammed to you ! So !' Andt she durned roundt andt ve vent starn virst . . . andt nottings habben . . .

nottings, onlie ze engineer he gome oop growlin' andt vanting a live-pelt. A live-pelt!" said the skipper, punching the rail, suddenly hilarious; then sobering, he fell back on the inevitable, "Give it lib, Misder Made, give it lib."

And the siren acknowledged his command.

"Other dime," he resumed meditatively, "I vass goming acroz the Bay. No vindt. Onlie svell—pig, lige the side of a houze, andt the *Venus* vant to zagg town on Benmarche; put I says, 'No, *Venus*, no you ton't. I vant get home again, zee my gurl andt draw zat dree veeks' bay vot iss mine—So!' Then I dwist her andt I dwist her ontil she looug lige she go to New York, andt I hang a bunge of razins on her bort bow andt she snivv them andt so ve get bast Benmarche vith no drouple a tall . . . So! Give it lib, Misder Made, give it lib."

And as the siren strolled up the scale, there came a scream from the bank they faced; one, short, swift scream; shrill, piercing the air.

The skipper gripped the rail and leaned out.

"Whad's that?" he questioned, suddenly grave.

"Whistle. Nothing in sight, though," said the mate.

"Give it lib, Mister Made," came the reply unruffled, "andt if it iss a sheep he vill run avay."

The *Venus* took the incident from the same calm aspect. She moved solemnly in the mist, brushing an acre of channel before her. Sometimes she bullied the night with her siren, sometimes strolled without speech. Five minutes passed, then the skipper, alive to contingencies, demanded: "Whad aboudt our lights?" facing the mate, head thrust forward, hands in pockets.

And Mister Mate climbed down the bridge ladder and went to see.

"Out!" he announced dimly from the forecastle, "out and be damned to them."

"Light zem!" came back in response, "or somesings vill habben sure."

The lamps were on deck, two souls striking matches leaned over them; the siren was silent, the sea watching triumphant—then, suddenly, out of the blackness came a long ray of light to dazzle them. It blinded the bridge.

"Zearchlide!" the skipper commented unmoved. "Bort! Hardt a-bort!"

The *Venus* was long in obeying. She dallied with the notion of starboard, put her hands on her hips while she considered the "steady" and finally swept calmly to port and butted.

She butted because there was something in her way. She continued butting because the engines remained at full speed.

Something hard and now lighted from stem to stern stood in her path to the south; something more durable than the steel sides of those sisters she had sent to the bottom; something more solid. An ironclad. One of the Fleet, manœuvring in search of the enemy, lights out.

"Bah!" said the skipper as he climbed the war-ship's netting. "I dold you so . . . vere iss all handts?"

Fifteen grimy souls mustered presently to answer this query—

"All here!"

"Goodt!" said the skipper. "Now ve loog andt zee vat ve moust bay."

He examined the side in the light of a lantern. A little strip was paintless.

"So!" said the skipper facing Nemesis, "I alvays say, sometay somesings vill habben . . .

andt it hass. Ze *Venus* this dime hass her own nose proken . . . Boor *Venus!*"

And the gulls looking at the hole she made in the greyness, swirled about and fought for the scraps still floating. But the day, when it came, dispersed the mists, and the sun looking out on the waters, noted the whirling gulls, the gambolling porpoise, and hearing nothing of the siren, decided to shine and make men warm.

A STRANGE LIGHT IN CHANNEL

Rain, mist, and tumbling seas.

A BLACK night, with thin, driven rain licking the masts and funnels, the houses and bridge, with a soft, dull patter. Falling here in a halo of steam, there hissing on the hot fiddleys; here cold on the tanned faces of the watch and everywhere pattering with the note of hurled shot. High aloft a gleam of radiance streamed white and staring upon the clouds. On either hand rose a blurr of coloured mist and spray, wonderful to see—on this side red, like blood; on that green, like the dim fires over a kiln. For the rest there was darkness.

And through it, springing buoyantly as a steeple-chaser, shaking spray-clouds from her head, a mailship, scintillating at the bows, fiery all down her throbbing sides, with a brush of fire-beads hissing in her wake, her signal-lamps blazing, driving over an arm of the sea we term

the Channel—a sea turbulent, profound, and nearly invisible.

Except in the form of spray, it did not exist; except from the intangible tangibility of knowledge, it was not there. A glance over the bridge screen revealed blackness, the blackness of a pit; empty, void, slashed with rain—yet out there vessels moved.

The watch crept about in the drizzle like black ghosts on a darkened stage.

Two bells!

Somewhere in the shadows a voice carolled, "Lights bright and all's well," and retired to brood upon the fact. The sound rolled down the decks and, as though in answer, or refutation, cynically inserted, there came a stifling and acrid smell. The smoke of an unseen steamer pushing through a halo of it, and, like a denizen of the slums, advertising his presence by the smell of rank tobacco. The watch stared. The man in the crow's-nest sniffed, but the gong he controlled made no suggestion, and the officers continued their watch with hunched shoulders. It was wet. The rain drove. They saw nothing.

Yet, out there in the spume and mist a

submarine slouched with her hand on the wall, holding a smashed nose. She skimmed by unseen, unheard ; a thing silent and mysterious as a ghost ; hiding her hurts, her sodden crew, and the ghastly business from which she scuttled, in the shroud of a kindly night. Darkness enveloped her, hid her. She was the centre of it, a machine escaping, tongue in cheek, unable to sink either that mailship or the tramp which moved in shadow beside her.

Rain, mist, and flying spray.

The watch bunched, the nest silent. Three bells ! Again the cry of "All's well," and a sarcastic smile on the face of the look-out in his eerie, sixty feet poised in space, as he gave voice to the opinion he had formed, "so fur."

There came the half-hourly stream of men who patrolled the decks, saloons, and passages far below ; the master-at-arms with a salute confirming the reports of those who had preceded him. "All's well in the saloon, sir ; all's well on the main deck, on the poop deck, lower deck, fore deck ; all's well ; all's well."

And the answers falling seriatim, "Good ; Very good ; Thank you," the salute punctilious

following from an officer free once more to watch the compass and admonish the helmsman.

Weariness, rain, and mist.

Phut! What a night for paper oilskins. "Say, sonny, who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?" The man in the nest threw forth the question at a venture and concentrated his gaze on a new distraction. Something out there approached in a halo of blurred light, and the nest accentuated the fact that he was keeping his eyes skinned by triple gong-strokes. Ahead, he particularized.

On the bridge the officers were already examining it, searching it with their night glasses.

"White," said the chief, "eh, Nicholls?"

"White, sir," the junior acknowledged. "A stern light probably."

"Perhaps . . . or masthead, or pilot-boat, or fishing boat, or anything . . ."

True. But meanwhile what was it?

It was unsteady. It burned sometimes large and sometimes small; sometimes went out and sometimes appeared like a will-o'-the-wisp floating in space. A flare of sorts, some one suggested and retired throbbing.

The man in the nest had doubts, that was evident by the way in which he repeated signals. The officers had theirs, they showed them by sending a messenger to call the commander. A strange light. A white light. A thing of hourly occurrence, yet strange. The man in the nest objected to its coming in phrases which stung.

The crew, gathered in groups on the lee side of the promenade, handy in case the officers should call, had no doubt about it, and declared it several things tinged with blood. The commander, when he arrived, decided it was the Start—a pronouncement which sent his officers to opposite corners of the bridge to chuckle unheard. The Start! It was plain the old man had not yet grown accustomed to the darkness, or—he dreamed.

Weariness, rain, and mist.

They stood again in a group, bunched behind the screen, staring over it. The rain drove up and blurred their glasses; sprays leaped joyously to flick faces already red with whipping; the great ship hissed onward kicking with her heels.

She regarded this phenomenon as solemnly as the watch. A light was there—one she did not comprehend. In that wide range of signals, all white, and all having different significations, sent by Authority to confuse and hinder a ship, this at all hazards was the stupidest. It was there. It was not there. It waned. It danced. The mailship put her head under a roller meandering slowly from the Atlantic, and flung up her heels in wonderment. She acknowledged that she was mystified. The sea whelmed her to the bridge and when she had lifted from her bath, the thing faced her, visibly near.

And out of the roar of spray and sea came the commander's voice: "Stand by, there!" And as the gong pealed: "Half speed! Stop!"

It was plain from this that he had recovered his sight; plain that he no longer dreamed.

He crossed the bridge as the steam broke gurgling high overhead, and approaching the chief, shouted and shook his head.

"You were right," he said. "No, not Start. It must be a flare."

Steam bellowed upon the words, drowning

them, and the two men bobbed together like a pair of pigeons in love. "Right," said one. "Quite so," the other; then, simultaneously, "Gad! it is a flare! See that?" They bowed and the chief turned away shrugging his shoulders. It was plain, plain, for those who knew and could read the signals.

There was evidence, too, for those who watched. For them, at all events, there was no further question, no halting, no guesswork. They would have to do or—— Well, on consideration, were they not British sailors, and, has not the Board of Trade watches, parchments, and binoculars to dispense in recognition of the thing called bravery at sea?

Shoulders were no longer bunched. Oilskins made of paper and otherwise had strapped upon them belts that made the men look heavy, yet would keep them light. A message had gone to the engine-room, another to the watch below. There followed the shrill scream of the bo'sun's pipes and a voice saying in a hoarse bellow: "Boat's crew, there! Number Two away! Bear a hand, my sons." Then down the black side out of sight of craning necks, forty feet through space, slid the small cockle-shell

dubbed Number Two, and departed punching the seas.

Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen—the light was no longer there to see, but in its place gleamed the boat signal.

It came at length under the mailship's lee, toiling through rollers that rose foaming to blot it out. The rain curtained it. The wind joined hands and shouted of victory in other fields; of the wreck throbbing on the edge of Skerries; of the stress of that stripped sailing ship clinging to the ground off Portland; of the strange gait of that tramp moving up Channel, hugging her hurts and scuttling for harbour. It rained. The mists were out. Chaos yawned. But the boat stole onward unswallowed, reached a rope, steadied beneath the tackles, and, in obedience to orders, crept rail high and halted.

"Seen anything. . . . What have you found?" came from the bridge.

They passed what it was on deck and the doctor leaned over it making strange movements with its arms. They passed up, too, a lifebuoy bearing a name—s.s. *Tomlinson*, Bristol; and at the end of a line fast to it, the flare, burnt out.

A young girl had rested in that lifebelt, a girl with yellow hair which hung limp and wet; unstirred now by the sea moaning restlessly at the loss it had sustained. A note escaped the crest of a roller charging through the shadows —it might have been a scream. And with it came a thrill, a movement of the childish form; a flicker of eyes long closed.

The doctor made no halt in those movements he had commenced with arms limp and heavy as clay.

The wind swept past the motionless vessel. Seas churned at her ports, gurgling up the glass, peeping to see how she fared who lay there so still, so white, but now panting.

The doctor continued his movements. From time to time he gave orders. Presently one stooped and raised the girl's head and there came softly a sound, almost a sigh—

"Mummie!"

The child's eyes opened and searched the cabin. Blue eyes which had looked one moment into the Beyond. And again after an interval came the voice, plainer now, with a note of fear—

"Mummie!"

From high above the wet decks sounded the stroke of time. Four bells! Then the cry of the watch: "Lights bright and all's well!"

But the mailship remained uncertain in the rain. Her boats were out running the risk of an individual or joint ascent, together with their ship, to realms from which no man has returned. They searched amidst the wreckage they found, praying for day.

It came at length with a dim mistiness which stole over the Channel rim and tinged the seas with saffron. It lighted the mailship lying there aslant the gale; picked out her ports, binnacles and the spider-web of her aerials; then passed leaving the greyness, the mist, rain and menace of a sou'-west wind.

But it discovered no boats, no wreck, no men clinging to spars or lifebuoys; no mother for that little one lying now between warm blankets in the ship's hospital; only matchwood and the jumbled oddments torn from a vessel's deck by a torpedo which had run true to the course set.

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